

## **The skilled coachee: An alternative discourse on coach**

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The Skilled Coachee: an alternative discourse on coach

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the role that coachees play in coaching conversations and relationships. It develops theoretical insights into the concept of a skilled coachee, providing an alternative discourse to that which is dominant in the coaching literature. Despite the emphasis on coachee benefits as an output of coaching, the prevailing discourse of coaching privileges the skills of the coach in coaching relationships and downplays the agency of coachees and the role this plays in coaching processes.

Using a hybrid research methodology, which draws on central tenets of action research and grounded theory, seven coaching relationships are examined using a mixture of observation, paired and individual interviews. The subsequent analysis suggests a heuristic of coachee skills and behaviours deployed in coaching conversations. These sets of skills and behaviours include: enabling mechanisms which enhance and facilitate the coaching conversation and defensive mechanisms which coachees - often unconsciously - can adopt to protect themselves from embarrassment or threat. These coachee skills work in complement with coach skills, as articulated in the coaching literature.

This study thus contributes an alternative discourse of coaching within which coachees are more agentic in the process, than has previously been acknowledged. This alternative discourse has three elements to it: (1) coaching is a skilled collaborative partnership where both parties utilise process skills; (2) all behaviours, whether enabling or defensive, are functional for the participants in maintaining a developmental relationship; (3) responsibility for the coaching process can be extended to encompass both coaches and coachees. These conclusions hold implications for a range of stakeholders, including coaches, coachees, scheme designers, academics, professional bodies, supervisors and therapists.

## **Candidate's Statement**

In this thesis, my research objectives were to examine the following questions:

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches, which influences coaching?

Breaking this question down, I identified three key sub-questions in order to help me identify the answer to this main question. These are:

- a. How do they use conversational devices and strategies?
- b. What impact do these have on coaching process?
- c. What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

This work is entirely my own individual contribution to knowledge and was not part of a collaborative group project of any kind. All secondary sources of data i.e. references are acknowledged in the text and referenced fully in the References section of the thesis.

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## **Introduction Chapter: Paul's Story**

### **Chapter Introduction**

In this chapter, I will introduce the focus for this thesis on the skilled coachee and will articulate the broad aims and objectives for the research. In particular, I will focus on where the impetus for the research came from and the personal connections I am making with this piece of work. I will then articulate what assumptions I am making within the thesis and explain the writing process, as well as the structure of the thesis.

### **Personal Background**

In 1999, I joined Sheffield Hallam University as a permanent full time lecturer, after working for the University for 3 years as a full time contract researcher. Upon completion of my research contract, I started working with a senior colleague. He had recently won a bid from the now defunct Yorkshire Forward to look at mentoring within Sheffield and wanted me to work on this, given my success on the previous research grant. Following the success of this mentoring project, we began to apply and were successful in getting funding for a number of other projects on coaching and mentoring, examining mentoring for exporting firms and other related mentoring programmes and schemes. Once joined by an academic from another university, we then created the Mentoring and Coaching Research Group, and, in 2002, started off the MSc in Coaching and Mentoring at Sheffield Hallam which is now in its thirteenth cohort. In addition, we began to work with a number of organisations helping them to develop their own coaching and mentoring programmes and assisting them in their leadership development programmes. Furthermore, we developed a competence in evaluation of coaching and mentoring scheme outcomes. Over the last 15 years or so, I have been involved in presenting at and running conferences with the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and have written a number of coaching and mentoring books, book chapters, journal articles and magazine articles on the topic area.

## Interest in The Skilled Coachee

Over the last 15 years, attempts to professionalise coaching have increased significantly in the UK. As well as the EMCC, there has been a rise in the number of professional body organisations within the UK: the International Coach Federation (ICF), the Association for Coaching and the Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS) are the three other main bodies in the UK. In addition, there are other professional organisations with an interest in coaching such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). What is noticeable about this rise in the professionalization agenda and popularity of coaching is that this has occurred not only in business coaching but in life coaching. Steve Peters, author of the Chimp Paradox (Peters, 2012) is one prominent example of a celebrity coach, working with prominent sports stars such as the snooker player, Ronnie O'Sullivan and cyclists Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton. This idea of celebrity coaches and mentors has extended into reality television shows such as The Apprentice, the X Factor and the Voice. Furthermore, a number of life style 'gurus' such as Paul McKenna and Scott Alexander have developed a range of books, mobile phone applications, and DVDs and their websites boast of celebrity endorsements. What each of these examples shows is that there is a cultural pre-disposition, in the UK at least, with the idea of the coach or mentor being a key player in individual success. Further than that, however, I argue that these celebrity coaches are claiming some of the success for themselves, as if they are the ones who are, in some sense, responsible for inventing that person and their success. Aspects of this can also be seen in professional sports managers, particularly in men's professional football, where managers appear to be personally associated with the success of their playing staff and much of the football club's on field success is attributed to the coach.

The reason for discussing these celebrity coaches and managers is that I believe that they are heavily influential in terms of the **discourse** that exists regarding coaching. As discourse is a concept I will be employing a great deal in this thesis, I will examine it as a concept now.

McAuley et al, (2007: 41) define discourse in this way:

"Discourses are subjective, linguistically formed ways of experiencing and acting and constituting phenomena that we take to be "out there". Such discourses are expressed in a // that can be thought written or said about a particular phenomenon. Moreover, by creating a phenomenon, discourses influence our behaviour"

Hence, the way which we talk and write and do things in relation to something, for example, coaching, influences its creation. However, once created, these things then influence our behaviour even though we are the people that have created them in the first place. Hatch and Cunliffe (2013:43) argue that power "is exercised through practices that arise in discourse to regulate what will be perceived as normal". Therefore, a prevailing discourse refers to a way of thinking, writing and acting in relation to something that sets the boundaries of what is considered to be normal for that phenomenon, in a way that crowds out or dominates other possible ways of seeing it. Hence, it is likely that popular television programmes such as Dragon's Den and The Apprentice contribute to the discourse about coaching as they offer those who view these programmes a version of 'normal' business behaviour where strong, direct challenge and criticism is portrayed as developmental and necessary. The dominance of these perspectives is in danger, I believe of crowding out different and alternative views of leadership and, particularly, coaching. Given, as I have argued above, discourse has a direct influence on future behaviour, I am therefore concerned about the popular image of life coaches, in particular and its impact on coaching theory and practice.

In this thesis I will make arguments about the prevailing discourse that exists within the coaching world and seek to propose an alternative discourse to that dominant one. In order to do that, however, I will seek to first explain where my interest in the idea of the skilled coachee originates from, by exploring my own personal experience.

## Paul's (His) Story

Prior to 1999, I had had little experience of the helping professions personally. My engagement with coaching came about, as described above, through an academic route. Hence, my principal interest in coaching was in the context of learning and development and of understanding its impact on organisations and their development. Whilst I have always had an interest in self improvement literature, it is fair to say that my understanding of executive coaching and mentoring process was limited, to say the least. That said, my work on the research grant was focused on organisational learning, albeit at a group level. It was only once I was part of developing the MSc in Coaching and Mentoring that I began to be engaged at a personal level, beginning to work with students and corporate clients on a one to one basis and understanding the impact of coaching at an interpersonal level. I began to notice the significant impact that the coaching and mentoring process could have on individuals in terms of their personal life journey as well as the need for individuals to have that type of development space. Nevertheless, it is still true to say that I was not seeing the personal impact on me as being critical to my relationship to coaching, as a coachee. Rather, I was seeing myself as developing as a coach, supervisor and trainer of coaches and mentors, as opposed to a consumer of such helping processes. Two key events changed this emphasis and meant that I began to engage with coaching and mentoring as a coachee/mentee far more than I had done previously.

Firstly, on 14th May 2002, my then-wife's elderly aunt and her house guest were brutally murdered by a farm hand, on her farm in North Wales. This occurred two days after my parents had left the farm after staying with her. This had a significant impact on my wife and me, not only in the short term in terms of grief, shock and anger but in the longer term in terms of the impact on our relationship. I recognised that, for the first time, I was stuck in terms of the way I was dealing with this and, in particular, how I was supporting my wife in dealing with it. As a result, I began to see the benefits of coaching at a personal level for the first time, rather than as an interested academic observer/spectator. I worked with a number of colleagues in terms of being able to deal with the aftermath of this event and recognising the impact that it had had on me personally, which I had not been fully aware of. This process helped me also to pay

attention to developmental issues about where I was in my life and career that I had not been paying attention to in the past.

The second event which occurred approximately two years later was the closure of Sheffield Business School and its re-organisation into four faculties. Although presented as simply a re-organisation, it was a traumatic event in the lives of many people who worked at the university at that time. For many, it seemed to symbolise a significant shift in the University, from being a successful polytechnic to becoming a 'teaching factory'. This prompted a period of considerable introspection and anxiety within the staff, including myself. The process of re-organisation meant that each member of staff had to, in essence, apply for their own jobs. Many people, who were able to leave and apply for other jobs, did so. Furthermore, a number of staff were made redundant as a result which meant there were significant levels of staff turnover and uncertainty about the future. Again, coaching and mentoring had moved from simply being an academic interest and job related specialism to one where I needed the process to help me gain some control of my life and personal direction. Compounded by these two events, my PhD that I had embarked on in 1998, in the area of knowledge management, was seriously stalling, partly due to a combination of work pressures, family life and supervisors leaving the university. However, a key reason was that I was no longer engaged with knowledge management as a discipline area and was now more interested in coaching and mentoring. However, despite conversations with helpful colleagues, it still took me some time before I was willing to admit that I would not be able to complete that thesis and that I should withdraw from the PhD programme at this stage. Again, it took a number of coaching conversations with several colleagues before I was ready to address the deep feelings of frustration and failure that I was experiencing. Therefore, I was beginning to recognise the importance and impact of coaching for myself although, in some ways, still resistant to it, for reasons that I shall explore below.

In 2008, I resolved to invest in a new PhD project (this one) which was focused on my area of interest - coaching. In doing so, however, I wanted this not to be a project where I was not involved and would be examining coaching at distance but one where I could engage with the phenomenon first hand and better understand in relation to others. In making this decision, I was also recognising that I could not divorce myself,

and my experience within the coaching world, from this research. In fact, I resolved that including me and my interventions in the field work would actually be a virtue in terms of this research process - this particular point will be explored further in the Research Methodology Chapter. However, whilst I recognised that I needed to be personally part of the research process, this decision did not consciously, at that early stage, include any implications for me as an individual or as a coachee; I envisaged the impact of this being principally on the research process and my methodology as a researcher. This was despite being more engaged with coaching at a personal level as I described.

A third event occurring in 2012 had a further significant impact on me and my relationship with coaching and helping processes more generally. In June of that year, my marriage of 14 years finally broke down which resulted in me leaving the marital home at the end of that month, leaving behind my then 12 year old daughter. Although I was then moving into a new relationship, I experienced the process of separation and loss as a personal failing, as I had with deterioration of that relationship. This resulted in a year-long divorce process involving disputes about contact with my daughter and division of assets. At the time, I was also experiencing significant work related stress due to pressures on workloads as part of my management role. As a result, I was struggling to function effectively at work and as a student on my PhD journey. I therefore decided to access some personal support by accessing the University's counselling services at the time. This was to be a pivotal moment in my own learning journey as it led to me recognising a number of things about myself and my ways of interacting with other people.

Firstly, I recognised that I had adopted a number of patterns of behaviour, at an unconscious level, in order to protect myself. In the early stages of therapy, I found that I was forgetting quite a lot of the content of the sessions and what was covered and had come out of them for me. I also found it quite difficult to be in touch with and to articulate what I wanted for the future for myself which led to me feeling very stuck in those sessions when I was asked to try and articulate those things. I realised that some of the patterns that I was exhibiting were patterns, probably developed in childhood, that were driving my behaviour and ways of coping with these challenges at work and outside work. Indeed, I found that, by working with the therapist, I was able

to recognise that the bullying I had experienced as a child had had a different sort of impact to the one I had expected. As well as some damage to personal self esteem (which I had expected), I was able to recognise that I had developed certain skills and techniques that allowed me to cope in the short to medium term. It seemed that, principally, I had developed these mechanisms to protect myself from any further damage to my self esteem by distancing myself from difficult feelings of anger or hurt. However, I had done this in an unconscious way, to the extent to which I was not aware that I was doing this.

For example, when I reported on a conflict situation with either my ex-wife or a co-worker, I would tend to do it in very rational terms, acknowledging their perspective and, in some ways, denying or discounting the emotions and challenges I was feeling. In the therapy sessions themselves, I would often feel low on energy and would struggle to engage with what might be causing these symptoms. My therapist helped me to understand that these coping patterns were useful in some ways as they allowed me to carry on in my various relationships (including the therapeutic one) and to be able to function at a certain level emotionally. However, they were also limiting in some ways as I was only able to cope and focus on a small number of issues at a time and my emotional engagement with what I was doing was weak.

At the same time, I was also receiving coaching from a colleague in order to try and deal with similar issues, but specifically about my own future orientation towards work and my passion towards it. Again, I was experiencing similar reactions in this context also. As a result of the therapy and coaching, I began to realise that, as well as these unconscious processes of protection, I was also to some extent using my verbal dexterity and familiarity with helping processes to help me deal with the challenges being put to me by the helpers. Whilst I had, indeed, chosen and engaged with those helping relationships, I recognised that at some level, part of me was resisting the process and seeking to fend off the helper so that they would 'leave me alone'. This would often be by talking about the coaching process in a rational and abstract way because this would enable me to appear to be engaged, whereas in some ways, I was not.



Following the initial stint of therapy, I attempted to re-engage with my PhD studies but, whilst I was able to make some progress, I found that I was experiencing some similar feelings in relation to the conducting of the field work and the writing up of this study. When discussing it with my new partner or with other colleagues, I would often seek to avoid engaging in in depth discussion about the research and would experience similar feelings of lethargy and stuckness that I was experiencing with the process, as I would with the therapy. It was only by recognising these patterns and confronting them did I realise that, again I was, at some level trying to protect myself as a supervisee and student from the perceived threat of failure and of not finishing the thesis. The added value of this realisation was that it helped me to recognise that these patterns of behaviour were not just limited to my role as a therapy client but extended into several other areas of my life. Nevertheless, despite this resistance, I was able to engage with these processes to find a way of progressing my work, my personal life and my studies. This was because, as I began to realise, as well as providing some challenges in terms of therapy, my knowledge and experience of helping relationships was, at the same time, helpful in terms of being able to work in the same direction as the helpers' interventions. The implications of these issues for my personal reflexivity are explored in the section below.

#### The Wheel of Paul

By recognising that these behaviours were impacting on a range of areas, I was able to understand my studies of the skilled coachee in a different way. I recognised that, in terms of my personal reflexivity, there were six main ways (see Figure 1) in which these behaviours were having an impact. Firstly, there were my two helping roles - coach and supervisor. By understanding the impact of these personal behaviour patterns on these helping behaviours, I anticipated that this would influence my approach in these roles. Secondly, I also recognised that becoming more aware of my own dominant patterns of behaviour in the helpee role (coachee and therapy client) would also have an impact on my role in current and future therapy sessions as well as a coachee in coaching sessions. This was because I was now much more likely to notice when I was using them. Finally, and critically, in the context of this thesis, I also recognised that this would have an impact on the kind of research and the kind of role I would take as a researcher in relation to this study.

Figure 1: The Wheel of Paul

My experience within the coaching world, however, suggested that this was not a commonly held view or approach. As part of my work at the university, I manage a Linked In group for our Coaching and Mentoring Research Unit (CM RU) which has approximately 600 members, all of whom are involved in coaching. A significant number of the group try to use the group, and other social media, as a way of selling their coaching methodologies and approaches. This is either direct in terms of offering workshops, masterclasses or conferences in coaching, or is indirect, taking the form of 'thoughts' or '5 key steps in coaching'. The underlying theory in use (Argyris and Schon, 1996) seems to be one of a process expert offering a paid service, with a clear interest from group members in understanding what tools and techniques they can adapt and use for their own practice. Conversely, there is a relative lack of interest and curiosity about the coachee's processes and what the implications of these might be for coaching theory and practice. My impression is that the coaching community,

particularly those involved in providing paid coaching services either as a consultant, executive coach, scheme designer or evaluation researcher, are principally interested in the technical and organisational aspects of coaching and seek to elevate coaching services to the status of other paid professional services such as accounting, law and related, older professions such as psychotherapy and counselling.

Nevertheless, my personal experience, described above led me to believe that the prevailing discourse in the coaching world does not necessarily describe the territory and fully capture how coaching relationships and conversations work. In particular, key players do not seem to focus on or be much interested in the role that coachee skills play in coaching conversations and how these relate to those of the coach. This led me to formulate a key question, which has driven this research process.

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches, which influences coaching?

Breaking this question down, I identified three key sub-questions in order to help me identify the answer to this main question. These are:

- a. How do they use conversational devices and strategies?
- b. What impact do these have on the coaching process?
- c. What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

Identifying answers to these research questions has driven the research process that I have engaged in. This process will be described in the section below.

#### The Research Process

As I will argue in the Research Methodology chapter, my intent in this research process was to develop an alternative discourse to the prevailing discourse present in the coaching world, by offering theoretical insights into the concept of the skilled coachee. Based on personal experience of working in the coaching world for the past 15 years, and of receiving therapy as described above, my belief was that part of the process -

that of the coachees' process skills in coaching - was being omitted from the coaching discourse. Whilst, as I will argue in the Literature Review chapter, there are some voices within the coaching world who are making a contribution to an alternative discourse, these are a small number of marginal voices.

In terms of completing this piece of research, my research process was as follows. Firstly, I sought to identify a number of coaching pairs who were willing to take part in the research and, as I will argue in the Research Methodology chapter, were likely to contain coachees who had skills and knowledge of coaching. I conducted the field work over several months, seeking to iteratively build my understanding of coachee process skills and being driven by the research questions articulated above. In short, I was trying to capture, using my observation of coaching sessions and post-coaching interviews, a snapshot of the coachee's role in the coaching process. Once this process was complete, I then immersed myself in the data (Moustakas, 1990) in order to identify a number of themes that seemed common within the conversations I had observed and engaged with. Following a grounded approach (see Research Methodology Chapter), I worked and re-worked the themes by engaging and re-engaging with the data, until I had identified a number of themes that offered a view of the coachees' process within their coaching sessions. Only once this was complete did I then engage with the literatures on coaching, therapy and power. This engagement with the literature was selective and informed by the data analysis process. Once again, the process of integrating the literature with the data analysis was iterative and recursive, from which I was able to generate an alternative discourse on coaching which includes the coachee's process skills.

#### The Structure of the Thesis

In this chapter, I have articulated my personal engagement with the topic area and what has led me to conduct research in this area. In doing so, I have articulated the research questions that have driven the research process. In Chapter 2, I conduct a critical selected review of the literature on coaching, therapy and power. My purpose in engaging with the literature here is to illustrate and support the claims made regarding the prevailing discourse in coaching as well as to provide some theoretical basis for drawing conclusions in the final chapter. In the Research Methodology

Chapter, I justify my research design approach, drawing on methodological, epistemological and ontological concepts to support my arguments. Within this, I build on the points made in this chapter about different roles that I take. In particular, I will argue for a separation of my researcher 'voice' from my supervisor 'voice' within the data analysis process. This chapter will then be followed by two data analysis chapters, which I have split conceptually, based on the findings, into enabling and defensive mechanisms respectively. Within each of these, I will put forward a thematic map which explains how I have coded the data collected and made sense of it, in terms of itself-the integration with the literature comes later. Finally, I will then discuss the findings in the context of the selected literature in the Conclusions chapter. This chapter will also include a clear statement about the contribution to knowledge that I have made, as well as considerations as to the limitations of the research and future research that I feel needs to be conducted in this area. Finally, and critically, given that I have brought in the personal into this thesis, I will end the Conclusions chapter in the same way, drawing out individual implications for different audiences as well as for the different roles that I personally play within the coaching world.

#### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have spelt out the personal and professional motivations for the study, articulated the research questions that drive the thesis and offered an outline for the thesis structure. In the next chapter, the Literature Review, I will take these ideas forward and engage with a selected literature on coaching, therapy and power to explore several discourses within coaching.

## Literature Review Chapter

### Chapter Introduction

In this review, I examine literature from coaching, therapy and organisational theory to explore three key themes which connect these areas, which are pertinent to understanding the skills that coachees use in coaching conversations. The three areas I will focus on are:

- the privileging of the coach
- coachee agency
- the uses and misuses of power.

Essentially, I will argue that the prevailing discourse within coaching is one that is coach-centric, but that it is possible to reframe this discourse, using appropriate literature, to argue for an alternative perspective on the coachee, which emphasises their skills, power and agency. I will draw on various sources, from a range of literatures, to explain and understand the impact of this on coaching theory and practice. The coaching literature can be divided in three broad clusters: practitioner-orientated books, academic books and theory based articles, and research based journal articles. Practitioner books tend to be focused on how to conduct coaching conversations, emphasising tools and techniques that the coach can use, whereas academic books and theory based articles tend to emphasise the theoretical models and philosophies of coaching that are used. Research on coaching tends to take the form of journal articles, although some is reported in books, also. These modes of literature will be examined within each of the three main themes. In order to do this, I will use the literature on coaching to illustrate and examine the coach-centric discourse. Furthermore, I will use literature from psychotherapy to examine coaching behaviours in terms of conscious and unconscious behaviours that clients engage in. Finally, I will use literature from organisational theory - principally, that of power - to understand and interpret the impact of coaching behaviours on coaches and coachees. I will argue that the concept of power and its use is critical to understanding coachee behaviours within coaching conversations.

## Literature Review Methodology

Given that I have taken a grounded approach to this piece of research, I conducted this review of the literature, following the data collection process. Hence the themes that emerged from the data analysis process have been used as prompts for exploring relevant themes within that literature. The role of the literature review in this thesis is therefore twofold. Firstly, the literature was used to enable a discussion of the themes that emerged from the data collection process and to draw out the implications of these for the various roles that I play within the field of coaching. Secondly, the purpose of the review was to provide data for how the role of the coachee is typically seen within that literature.

As the literature review was conducted after the data collection process, there is an argument for placing this after the findings chapters. However, because the literature review can also be seen as a source of data regarding the prevailing discourse in the field of coaching, it made more sense to include it here. This approach has been used, as the principal aim is to induct a theory regarding the place of the coachee in coaching skills, although, as Blaikie (2007) argues, it is difficult to argue that this research approach is purely inductive, given my prior knowledge of the field (see previous chapter). When approaching the literature review, my aim was not to cover all relevant literature on coaching, psychotherapy and power - clearly this would be impossible in one thesis, given the sheer volume of material in these topic areas. Rather, my aim was to identify typical examples of the different aspects of the coaching and therapy discourses and then to use the context of power and agency to interrogate these literature sets, in order to see how the discourse might be positioned differently. These sets of literature have then been organised into three main themes.

### Privileging The Coach

Whilst there are many practitioner books on coaching, a search of web sites such as Amazon identifies a number of books that are particularly popular (see Table 1: 23). In this sense, these can be seen as representative of a dominant popular discourse on coaching. These will be explored in conjunction with other sources in this next section. I will argue that all of these texts - albeit in different ways - emphasise the skills and

processes of the coach but pay little if any attention to the contribution that the coachee makes to the process.

In his practitioner book, *Effective Modern Coaching*, Downey (2014) introduces the reader to the notion of coaching and chooses to avoid the usual term of "coachee". Rather, he prefers the term "player" because, as he argues, coachee "has the suffix - 'ee' at the end, which denotes someone who has something done unto them - think divorcee" (Downey 2014:24). Based on the work of Tim Gallwey, author of texts such as *The Inner Game of Tennis* (Gallwey, 1974) and *The Inner Game of Work* (Gallwey, 1997), Downey argues for a model of coaching which puts the 'player' at the centre of the coaching and emphasises the importance of "following interest" in the service of the player. He resists labelling this approach as non-directive, as he does in his previous books (Downey, 1999, 2003), but, in keeping with Gallwey's (1974) approach, argues against a more directive approach to coaching - where the coach tells or advises the coachee/player - as reducing "the opportunity for the player to think or be creative, limits the possibility of their taking responsibility and takes any satisfaction or joy out of what limited achievements there might be" (Downey, 2014: 44). Downey is clear, throughout his books, that the coachee's agenda should be at centre of what the coaching is about. What is noticeable about his approach is that he places almost exclusive emphasis on the skills of the coach in achieving a successful coaching intervention. Although he includes, in his 2014 text, a chapter on the genius of the player, this does not extend to his being explicit about their skills in coaching and being coached. Instead, he again focuses on the coach's skills:

"A huge part of enabling genius is coaching, and the effective coaching model embraces many approaches, from following interest to teaching, that give the skilled coach a lot to play with" (Downey, 2014: 218).

However, analysing some of his coaching examples seems to belie this impression. For instance, on p101 (Downey, 2014) gives an example of part of a coaching conversation where the coach is talking to the player about what direction to follow in the coaching conversation:

Player: I am really concerned about the new strategy Bob presented yesterday



Coach: How concerned, on a scale of one to ten?

Player: That's a really good question. Actually, only about three or four.

Coach: So do we need to discuss it now?

Player: No, it's more important that we talk through the conference next week

Downey puts forwards this account as evidence of skilled questioning in coaching in terms of the coach helping the coachee decide where to focus their attention. Whilst there is clear use of scaling techniques and some challenge in this small excerpt, the player also seems to be displaying some skills here in terms of deciding how best to use the coaching time and prioritising what is most important. Similarly, the following excerpt is from a coaching session where the focus is on the coachee's management of time:

Coach: So what is your longer term goal for your time management?

Player: If I could get to a position within the next month, where I am saving three hours a week, processing less paper and getting the weekly reports out on time, that would be just great. (Downey, 2014: 185)

Once again, in his analysis, Downey focuses on the coaching skills and initiative demonstrated by the coach in focusing the player on his long term goals. However, he pays little attention to the skills required from the coachee in terms of their ability to reflect on their own practice, decide relevant and appropriate goals and be able to articulate them to the coach.

Whitmore's (2009) practitioner book "Coaching for Performance", like Downey's, draws on the work of Gallwey (1974, 1997) in terms of emphasising the coach's role as one of facilitation:

"Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance" (Whitmore, 2009:10).

Whitmore also, in common with Downey, seems to caution against an approach which tells the coachee - or performer, as Whitmore sometimes refers to them - what to do. As a strong advocate of goal focused coaching, using the GROW model of coaching, he

emphasises the importance of the coachee having ownership of a coaching session in terms of its outcome:

"If the coachee has sought a session, clearly it is he (or she) who needs to define what he wants to get out of it" (Whitmore, 2009: 58).

However, this ability to clearly state goal outcomes seems to be treated as unproblematic and not identified as a skill on the part of the coachee. Like Downey, Whitmore offers sample quotes from coaching conversations to illustrate his argument. In the excerpt from one of these conversations, shown below, Whitmore (2009: 65) shows how a coach is helping a coachee to commit to a physical fitness programme - Mike is the coach and Joe is the coachee:

Mike: Let's look long term for a moment. What is the purpose of getting fitter for you?

Joe: I'm just feeling lousy about myself and my work is suffering. I want to feel good again

Mike: Fine. How fit would you like to be by when?

Joe: I would like to lose 15 pounds or so, and within a few months be able to not only run upstairs and for the train without getting out of breath but to actually enjoy running

Whitmore (2009) offers this example as part of an illustration of the goal setting aspect of GROW model. Whilst it does illustrate this, it also seems to show Joe's ability in being able to articulate exactly what he wants in a way that Mike can then work with. However, it is noticeable that, like Downey, Whitmore pays much more attention to what the coach does in the conversation in terms of process than that of the coachee. This is ironic given that both are emphasising the importance of the coachee in the relationship and the process and both are critical of an instructor led model of learning.

Rogers (2012) in her book on coaching skills, articulates similar values to that of Downey (2014) and Whitmore (2009) in that she emphasises equality, self-awareness and focusing on the coachee's agenda:

"Coaching is a partnership of equals whose aim is to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness through focused learning in every aspect of the client's life. Coaching raises self-awareness and identifies choices. Working to the client's agenda, the coach and client have the sole aim of closing the gaps between potential and performance" (Rogers, 2012: 7)

She goes on to articulate 6 key principles of coaching, the first of which emphasises the client's resourcefulness in being able to solve their problems. However, this resourcefulness is attributed to those personal characteristics that the client can use (e.g. self reliance, self worth) in their lives, to resolve challenges and issues, rather than to any skilled behaviour as a coachee. She seems to be seeing resourcefulness of the coachee as a content issue for the coachee to work on, rather than a coachee process skill.

Julie Starr in her book (Starr, 2008) explores coaching from the point of view of the basic skills and processes needed to start off coaching other people. Like Downey (2014), Whitmore (2009) and Rogers (2012), Starr (2008) is focused on helping coaches to develop the skills she feels they need to operate successfully as a coach. In a similar vein to the authors already mentioned above, she places emphasis on what the coach does but also asserts that the coachee is central to that process:

"The coach believes in the ability of the individual to create insights and ideas needed to move their situation forward. The task of the coach is to use advanced skills of listening, questioning and reflection to create highly effective conversations and experiences for the individual" (Starr, 2008: 20)

Whilst Starr clearly acknowledges some ability in the coachee, she does not focus on this in her text, for the most part. In Chapter 8 (Starr, 2008), she comes closest to this when discussing the concept of emotional maturity. As with the rest of the text, the main focus of her attention in this chapter is on using emotional competences from the work of writers such as Goleman (1996, 1998) to inform the practice of the coach. She does, with each emotional competence, make a link to the coachee but this is principally in terms of seeing these competences as outputs for the coachee from the coaching process, as opposed to acknowledging the process input that the coachee makes to the coaching process. For example, when discussing self-awareness, Starr

(2008:281) describes the coachee's development in terms of being more aware of their own talents:

"As you work with a coachee over several sessions, their overall self-awareness tends to improve. For example, they might shift from feelings that they have few development needs to realising that there's quite a lot they can get better at. Alternatively, they may begin to appreciate some of the finer qualities and talents that they have"

Whilst she does focus on coachee skills here, they are skills that are seen as an output to the coaching interventions made by the coach and are more about the content issues within the coaching than how the coaching is conducted.

In his text on Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) in coaching, Phil Hayes (2008) explores coaching "with an NLP accent" as he puts it (Hayes, 2008: 2). As with Downey (2014), Whitmore (2009) and Starr (2008), Hayes's emphasis in his work is on the coachee being the focus. His definition, like that of Jenny Rogers, suggests a coachee-centric focus:

"The coach helps the client increase their effectiveness in areas of life and work chosen by themselves, to goals and standards defined by them" (Hayes, 2008: 6)

However, despite this rhetoric, it is clear that the text mainly focuses on the skills of the coach in helping the coachee progress and there is little space afforded to any process skills on the part of the coachee. Again, looking at examples of coaching conversations offered in the text, there does seem to be an acknowledgement that coachees need to offer metaphors and other linguistic patterns for the coach to be able to engage with. In the example below, the coach works with the client's metaphor for conceptualising his decision making at work:

Client: When I think about all the decisions I've got to make, it makes me feel as if I am coming up to a huge crossroads - more like spaghetti junction in fact

Coach: And what does Spaghetti Junction feel like to you right now?

Client: Well it's really big and busy and confusing, and the traffic is coming up to it really fast - it feels like it's going to be difficult to slow down enough to judge which way I should go! I feel like I'm going into it out of control.

Coach: OK, so how about we slow down now and think about it? We could even sit in the lay-by for a while so you can make a few calm decisions well before you get there! (Hayes, 2008: 44-45)

As with other examples quoted above, the author uses this snippet to emphasise the skill of the coach in matching and engaging with the metaphor offered by the client, in this case, getting them to manipulate the metaphor of Spaghetti Junction so that they are able to change their behaviour. Whilst this is the case, it is also noticeable that Hayes does not focus on the skill of the coachee (client) in generating the metaphor and articulating it to the coach in this way. The client in this example has made the connection with an image and a sense of panic and is able to communicate this in a way that the coach can ask questions about. This is not, however, labelled as skilled behaviour, in the same way that the coach's behaviour is. Like with the other authors discussed so far, there is a clear assumption that the coach drives the process and the coachee/client responds to these promptings in relation to their life or career, without allowing for the possibility that coachee skills are involved in these interactions.

Meggison and Clutterbuck's (2005, 2009) books are focused on skilled behaviour / techniques that coaches and mentors can use in their conversational work. In both texts the authors are careful to offer some critique for the use of techniques that are examined in the books. The techniques are drawn from a range of approaches to coaching e.g. narrative coaching, cognitive behavioural coaching and gestalt with all emphasising a sensitivity to the clients' agendas. Indeed, in the conclusions to their second text (Meggison and Clutterbuck, 2009), they argue strongly for a movement away from a coach-centric agenda, asking the following critical question:

"Given that the value of coaching and mentoring often lies in enabling the client to view their issues from other perspectives, is it ethical and appropriate for the coach or mentor to limit those alternative perspectives to those which fit the coach's or mentor's own philosophical approach?" (Meggison and Clutterbuck, 2009: 238).

Nevertheless, there is, similarly, no voice in the account for coachee skills or agency in terms of the coaching process. Clients/ coachees are principally construed, by all contributors to the texts, as being the recipients of the processes offered by the coaches, with the resource, in terms of intervention or technique, coming from the coach.

In their book on Brief Coaching, Berg and Szabo (2005: 1) argue that the process that they outline "utilizes what clients bring to the coaching relationship and conversation; that is, they already have skills, views and many other tools". This is essentially a solution focused approach to coaching. In the text (p40) they include a section which is entitled using client skills. However, it becomes clear that Berg and Szabo are referring to clients' experience and resources from other situations that they can use to bring to the coaching session, as opposed to utilising any process skills within the coaching session. The emphasis as with all of the approaches discussed so far is on the coach directing the client to focus in a particular area, with the client essentially providing the content for the coach to work with:

"We hope we have shown you that being effective and efficient can work side by side with a respectful approach to utilizing the abilities and competencies that clients bring with them to the coaching process. It is often the case that many clients have been so pre-occupied with their problems that they need a slight nudge from the coach to look in the right direction" (Berg and Szabo, 2005: 43).

Again, whilst placing the client (coachee) at the centre of the intervention, the coach, nevertheless, is the focus for the text with the client's contribution principally being one of bringing the issue and the content so as to enable the coach to have something to work with. Similarly, in Co-Active Coaching (Kimsey-House et al, 2011), whilst a great deal of emphasis is placed on the coachee as the focus for the coaching, there is still a sense - despite the emphasis on co-action - that the coach is the primary decision maker in terms of process and that it is their skills and abilities that need to be focused on:

"Coaches play a key role by holding a vision of what is possible and through their commitment to transformative experience. Coachees still choose the topic, the action and the results they want. But by taking a stand for the greatest possible impact from

even the smallest action, coaches encourage and ultimately evoke transformation" (Kimsey-House et al, 2011: 9).

Kimsey-House et al (2011) emphasise the resourcefulness of the client in terms of generating solutions but in examining what they call the five contexts of coaching - listening, intuition, curiosity, forward and deepen, self-management - all efforts are directed towards the skills of the coach. In the sample dialogues included in the text, the majority seem to emphasise the clear sightedness of the coach and their ability to see things that the coachee does not recognise. In the example below, the coach is said to be demonstrating the skill of articulation, within the context of listening:

"Coachee: ...so that's why I came up with this alternative plan. I think it's a reasonable alternative. I think I can make the deadlines they've set.

COACH: Can I tell you what it sounds like over on this side of the line?

Coachee: Sure. You see a hole in there somewhere?

COACH: Actually, no. I'm sure the plan is sound. What I see, though, is an old pattern of accommodating other people's demands, almost no matter how unreasonable, at personal cost to you. It's one of the things you said you wanted to change. This looks like backpedalling" (Kimsey-House et al, 2011: 41, capitalisation in original source)

Whilst there appears to be evidence (albeit self-reported) within the examples, that the coachees find the interventions helpful, the composite picture, developed in the text, of a typical coachee is one of a confused, stuck individual who seems to lack confidence and insight. The coach, in contrast, is portrayed here, as an individual who is resourceful, has insight and is prepared to hold the coachee to account in terms of focus and in facing what is 'really' going on for the coachee.

Looking at a range of bestselling practitioner books on coaching, as suggested by Amazon, there do seem to be some similar patterns emerging. I have examined texts from a range of different perspectives in coaching. The purpose in doing so was to get a sense of the dominant voices in coaching and, in particular, how these writers see

the role of the coach and coachee respectively. In examining these texts, I sought to summarise where the writer seemed to be focusing their attention, particularly in relation to the coachee. Hence, the descriptors are mine but paraphrased from the claims and emphasis that the writer has placed on the roles.

Table 1: Practitioner Books On Coaching

Authors	Approach	Role of Coach	Role of Coachee
Bachkirova (2011)	Developmental coaching/ adult development	Helping people to engage full with their own development	3 notions of self, self determined individual helped by coach to achieve developmental goals
Berg and Szabo (2005)	Solutions focused	Process expert using range of solutions focused techniques	Resourceful individual that has solutions within them
Bluckert (2009)	Gestalt	Process expert who engages with immediate experiences of client	Some clients have strong "coachability", others more resistant
De Haan (2008)	Relational coaching/ humanistic	Helper who works through enriching the coaching relationship	Coachee as client, recipient of coach's process but may have different learning styles
Downey (1999, 2014)	Business coaching/ goal focused	Process expert who uses the GROW model to make the player	Seen as player, who actively decides and thinks about what to do, although a receiver of the coach's process



		think	
Driver (2011)	Positive psychology	Builder of capability based on a focus on strengths, positive emotions	Holder of strengths - to be guided by coach on how to use these
Flaherty (2010)	Business coaching	Process expert who challenges the coachee to think things through	Recipient of the coach's methodology and process
Gallwey (1974, 1997)	Inner Game, Non directive, sports coaching roots	Process expert who encourages Self 2	Resourceful capable and needs help suppressing critical self
Hayes(2008)	NLP coaching/humanistic	Process expert who uses a number of techniques to help clients emerge from negative mind set	Bringer of dilemmas and issues - not seen as bringing process
Hunt and Weintraub (2011)	Line manager/leader as coach	Ask questions, not give solutions, process expert	Employee who needs help thinking through their actions - recipient of coach-manager questioning process
Jackson and McKergow (2007)	Solutions focus, SIMPLE and OSKAR Models	Process expert who focuses on what works not a deficit model	Seen as the performer and as recipient of the OSKAR process - no focus on performer skills
Kilburg (2000)	Executive coaching,	Develop wisdom in the client, use	Recipient of coach methodology, executive

	Coaching psychology, psychodynamics	of range of behavioural techniques	leader/manager needs help in developing leadership approach
Kimsey-House et al (2011)	Co-active coaching	Change agent for the client	Resourceful, whole person - needs coach to be alongside them and to apply methodology
Kline (1999)	Thinking environment, incisive questions, active listening	Giver of attention to client	Able to resolve own issues once thinking environment is established
Lee (2007)	Psychodynamic	"Good enough coach", works with transference and counter-transference	Driven by unconscious, defensiveness, coachee as recipient of coach's processes
Meggison and Clutterbuck (2005, 2009)	Coaching tools and techniques	Process expert who uses a range of techniques to help clients progress	Client as recipient of coach's tools and techniques - no examination of coachee skills
Peltier (2010)	Coaching psychology	Coach as expert in using psychological constructs to help coachee	Needs help in becoming aware of own motivations and drivers
Reardon (2010)	Life coaching	Coach as process expert, holds client accountable for their actions	Recipient of client methodology; goes through activity sheets and exercises as determined by coach
Rogers (2012)	Executive	Skilful questioner,	Client seen as resourceful but

	coaching	offers challenge and support	needing process skills of coach to realise this
Starr (2008)	Business	Skilled listener	Emotionally intelligent,
	coaching	and questioner	resourceful but needs process skills of coach
Whitmore (2002, 2009)	Performance	Process expert in	Recipient of GROW
	coaching, GROW model	GROW and setting effective goals, non directive	methodology, client skills not focused on

In summary, this analysis of these texts revealed a strong emphasis on the coach as process expert and, for the most part, the coachee positioned as recipient of that process, rather than being seen as have a process role to play in the conversation and in the relationship.

This view is also present in the more academically focused literature on coaching. For example, in Chapter 15 of Passmore et al (2013: 287-297), Jane Brodie Gregory and Paul E Levy examine Humanistic/Person centred approaches to coaching. As in the practitioner literature, the emphasis here is on the facilitative efforts of the coach in helping the client move forward.

"One key role of the coach is to facilitate the client's learning in a way that helps him/her to grow and develop..It is important to note, however, that the coach himself/herself does not drive the client's development, but helps the client to find and utilise his or her own innate drive to grow and develop" (Passmore et al, 2013: 288).

In their updated edited text Cox et al (2014) review thirteen different theoretical traditions within coaching. These approaches are summarised in Table 2 - as before, the descriptors are my interpretation of the way they view the coachee within the coaching relationship, based on my analysis of where these writers have focused their attention:

Table 2: Cox et al (2014) Theoretical Traditions

Theoretical Coaching Approach	Focus of Approach	Role of Coach	View of Coachee
Psychodynamic (Lee)	Unconscious motives, defences	To work with clients' awareness of what might be driving their behaviour	Unaware of own motivations and drives - needs help to become aware
Cognitive Behavioural (Williams, Palmer and Edgerton)	Thinking errors, unhelpful patterns of behaviour	To help client identify and enact effective ways of thinking and behaving	Needing support in uncovering how dominant patterns of thinking might be limiting in terms of goal attainment
Solution Focused (Cavanagh and Grant)	Desired future state, what already works	To help client use own resources to build on what already works to get to preferred future	Potentially resourceful but needing help in mobilising these resources
Person Centred (Joseph)	Unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathetic understanding	Creates the conditions for self actualisation	Resourceful, assuming the correct process and conditions have been created
Gestalt (Bluckert)	Being fully aware of own experiences	Use of own subjective experience as part of dialogue with client	Resourceful but potentially blocking own sensations and experiences - needs help in terms of developing awareness

Existential (Spinelli)	Relatedness, uncertainty and existential anxiety	Helping clients to explore their own existence and world view	Needing help with a process for dealing with their own existential challenges and uncertainties
Ontological (Sieler)	Focus on language emotion and physiology	Catalyst for change for client by shifting clients' way of being	Recipient of coach's methodology for change
Narrative (Drake)	Use of written material, stories, identity	Helps coachee to establish connections between stories, identity and behaviours	Seen as narrator of their own stories, which coach provides process for working on
Developmental (Bachkirova)	Stage theories of adult development	Uses knowledge of transitions to help client move between stages	Engaged in self development project, in process of becoming
Transpersonal (Rowan)	Connectedness to others, completeness, joy, spirituality	Enhancing creativity, use of intuition and imagery	Potentially creative and resourceful - needs help realising this
Positive Psychology (Boniwell, Kauffman and Silberman)	Focus on strengths and opportunities, building on what works	Helps clients to recognise and leverage strengths	Resourceful and possessing strengths - needs process help to realise these
Transactional Analysis (Napper and Newton)	Ego states, life scripts and patterns of	Focus on raising client awareness of own motivations and those	Recipient of coach's framework for understanding and

	interaction and communication	of others	working with interactions
NLP (Grimley)	Patterns of reality construction, ways of learning, matching, pacing techniques	Use of wide range of techniques to change inner experiences of client	Recipient of coach's framework for understanding and interpreting reality

In each of these examples, there are a number of common threads:

1. The coach is seen as the process expert
2. The coachee's issues are seen as central
3. The coachee is seen as resourceful but lacking in the skills to realise their full potential
4. When coachee skills are addressed, they are seen as an output of the coaching process rather than an input to it.

Passmore et al (2013)'s edited text covers similar areas (see Table 3). Like Cox et al (2014), the contributors to Passmore et al's (2013) text place the coachee/client's issues as central but each approach makes different assumptions about the best ways to support the client. As before, I have analysed these contributions by the focus of their approach and their view of the coach and coachee. Again, in most of the approaches, the coach's process expertise is privileged. In narrative coaching, the coachee is expected to have more scope in terms of the process of storytelling. Kempter and Iszatt-White's (2012) article proposes a practical application of this which they term co-constructed coaching. Using this approach, they suggest that both the coach and coachee move away from a non-directive approach to coaching on the part of the coach to one where each party in the conversation helps the other to construct a narrative about the phenomena in question - in the case of their research, leadership. They argue that in this regard the coachee is helping the coach to construct a narrative about leadership using their lived experience. In turn, the coach - or researcher as they describe it - is using their content knowledge of leadership theory,

organisational theory etc and applying this to the writing of the coach, helping them to construct a "deeply heightened understanding of their lived experience and the dynamics that have shaped their learning" (Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2012: 330). In this model is an explicit acknowledgement that the coach/researcher is explicit about their own agenda and what they get out of it and that the coachee's role in the relationship is to help them achieve this. They acknowledge however, that more research is needed into how this relationship would be set up and contracted for and recognise that they do not yet have an answer to the question "is co-constructed coaching a specialist skill that requires particular training" (Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2012: 322). Nevertheless, like the other approaches discussed, the onus appears to be on the coach to determine the narrative framework that is utilised.

Table 3 Passmore et al (2013) Theoretical Approaches

Theoretical Coaching Approach	Focus of Approach	View of Coach	View of Coachee
Humanistic (Bodie Gregory and Levy)	Non directive, whole person approach, positivity and wellbeing	Helps client to better care for self, have better work/life balance	Seen as whole person who is full and authentic self - needs process expert in coach to help realise potential
Behavioural (Eldridge and Dembkowski)	Stimulus control, re-inforcement, modelling, rehearsal, goal setting	Challenges and incentivises client using challenge and support, process expert	Recipient of coach's process, driven by reward and punishment incentives - no role to play in contributing to

			coaching process
Cognitive Behavioural (Palmer and Williams)	Thinking errors, overcoming blockages to change, 'homework'	Process expert, uses range of models, tools and techniques to raise client awareness and change behaviour	Lacking in appropriate thinking skills, needs to improve self-awareness via help from coach
Motivational Interviewing (Anstiss and Passmore)	Self determination theory, developing discrepancy, self efficacy	Works to understand client motivation, empowers client re their future, works with client resistance	Seen as worthwhile and autonomous and free to choose own solutions - recipient of coach process
Psychodynamic (Diamond)	Transference, counter-transference, dependency, regression	Analyst of clients' relationships, diagnoser of challenges of leaders eg narcissism, paranoia, regression	Recipient of coach process, lacking awareness of what drives their behaviour
Gestalt (Spath, Toman, Leichtman and Allan)	Cycle of experience, paradoxical theory of change, experimentation	Uses relationship and own experience of client to enrich relationship	Resourceful but sometimes blocked by not fully experiencing own sensations - needs coach's process help to do this
Narrative (Stetler)	Intentionality, agency identity, co-production of knowledge via stories	Facilitator and partner in production of narrative	Independent agent capable of taking initiative albeit within narrative frame as designed by coach
Positive Psychology (Freire)	Enhancing resources, focus on strengths and	Promotes strengths of clients, helps client to apply strengths to	Recipient of coach's process, resourceful and capable



competencies,            problem resolution  
building positive  
qualities

In summary, therefore, it can be seen that, within the coaching literature, the contribution that coachees make to process is relatively muted, with much of the attention in the literature focused on what the coach does. In the next section, the concept of coachee agency, against this backdrop of coach-centric literature, will be examined.

#### Coachee Agency

Whilst the prevailing discourse in the coaching literature appears to be coach-centric, it is possible to identify aspects of the literature where the coachee's agency is explored. Drawing from selected coaching, psychology and organisational theory literature, I will argue that it is possible to reframe the coaching relationship in a way that recognises the coachee's agency in the relationship.

Inden (1990: 23) defines human agency as: "the realised capacity of people to act upon their world and not only know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and, reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view"

This ability to act purposefully and to proactively create one's own world is explored in the work of Bachkirova (2011). In her text on developmental coaching, Bachkirova (2011) examines the role of the 'self' using literature from neuroscience, psychology and sociology. She examines three versions of the self. The first metaphor that she uses is that of the self as "operator" which is a part of human beings that receives experiences and data and then decides what to do with them in terms of action. In coaching terms, this affords the coachee and the coach with a considerable amount of agency in terms of their actions. However, the second metaphor that she offers gives the opposite view. This second "story" is that there is no self:

"To summarise, the second story treats conscious will as an illusion. Our actions spring out of innumerable combinations of forces and connections in our brain/mind/organism constantly interacting with environment. More often than not all of these are made not by a conscious rational agent, but by underlying process. The rational self only notices the decisions being made and thinks that it is the author of these decisions" (Bachkirova, 2011: 41).

She settles on the third notion of the self as evolving and developing, which, therefore, draws heavily on adult development and developmental psychology research. She refers to the work of Keegan and Lahey (2009) within which they develop a typology of adult development which has three broad stages of cognitive complexity:

1. The Socialised mind - sense of self shaped by expectations and perceptions of other people
2. The Self Authoring mind - people use their own criteria, judgments and values to drive things forward
3. The Self Transforming mind- this is where people can stand back from their own ideology and point of view and recognise the value of multiple perspectives

Self- transformation, in this story, is seen to be of a higher order for both coachees and coaches. In this sense, their work has some connections with Knowles et al (1998: 64) who provide a useful set of alternative definitions of what it means to be an adult, which are paraphrased below:

Biological adulthood - we become adults at the age we can reproduce, typically in early adolescence

Legal adulthood - we become adults when the law says we can vote, marry without consent etc

Social adulthood - we become adults when we start performing adult roles like buying a house, being a parent, working full time etc

Psychological adulthood - we become adults when we arrive at an understanding of being responsible for our own lives and being self directed

Knowles et al (1998) argue, in similar vein to Keegan and Lahey (2009) that the psychological domain is a critical one in terms of being self directed. This has some commonality with Bruner's (1979, 1990) notion of intentional states. Summing up the implications of her own analysis, Bachkirova (2011: 54) argues that "one of the important implications of the third story of self is the actual fact of the possibility of change in the self".

However, although Bachkirova (2011) is arguing for the implications of self for both coach and coachee, she still, in terms of skill, comes down on the side of focusing on the coach's development in terms of skills applicable to coaching:

"Therefore, coaches have to be aware of their own stages of development in order to reflect on their own role in the coaching process and the dynamics of the coaching relationship. With each stage they reach they become more capable of taking a number of perspectives on situations and understanding more people (Bachkirova and Cox, 2007). They are thereby, able to articulate, influence and change more critical situations in the coaching process" (Bachkirova, 2011: 55).

Nevertheless, using the notion of the emerging and developing self and applying this to the coaching process itself, it is possible to conceive of a coachee who, with a self-transforming mind, may be able to influence and contribute to the coaching process, rather than just in terms of providing the focus and content for the coaching sessions themselves. In their research study into executive coaching, Louis and Diochon (2014) do, partially, achieve this. Their research agenda was focused specifically on the coach and their awareness of power dynamics in the coaching relationship within an organisational executive coaching context. Using critical incident theory, they interviewed 20 coaches about their organisational coaching experiences. As a result, they identified a typology of agendas that impact upon executive coaching relationships. Of the 13 agendas they identify as being played out in coaching relations, the three principle agendas that were coachee driven were:

1. The Organization Excluded - the coachee wants to work with coach on their exit strategy and future career without telling anyone in the organization that they intend to leave

2. The Apparent Compliance - the coachee agrees to be coached but then withdraws psychologically from the relationship, agrees behaviour changes with no intention of following through
3. The Imaginary Hidden Agenda -the coachee suspects a hidden organisational agenda for the coaching and therefore does not develop a trusting relationship with the coach.

In each of these cases, the coachee demonstrated their ability to directly impact on the process and progress of the coaching relationship in a skilled way. In the first example, the coachee uses their agency in terms of the organisationally sponsored coaching process to divert the attention of the coach away from the organisationally approved agenda to the personal agenda of the coachee. In the second example, the coachee demonstrates skilful behaviour in seeming to acquiesce to the coaching process but, in reality, not engaging with any behavioural change, whilst in the final example, the coachee protects themselves from disclosing personal feelings or information to avoid this being exploited. Whilst these behaviours are principally defensive in nature, they are functional for coachee as they each provide a way of the coachee to protect themselves and their future career, using the coaching relationship. Louis and Diochon (2014) principally draw out the implications for coach training and development but say nothing about coachee development or training. In this sense, this resonates with Welman & Bachkirova's (2010) earlier work on power in coaching, in that their focus is on raising coach awareness of power issues. However, Welman & Bachkirova (2010: 148) also suggest that coachee may lead the coach "into territory that is not of their choosing and resist attempts to move in the direction that is".

Carroll and Gilbert (2008), in contrast, explicitly focus on the development of the executive coachee and attempt to argue for coachees taking a more active role in their own development processes. In their practical manual for coachees, they seek to offer a guide for coachees in being effective in executive coaching relationships. They offer six skills which they say are central to being an effective executive coachee:

1. Learning how to learn
2. Learning how to give and receive feedback
3. Learning realistic self-evaluation

4. Learning how to reflect
5. Learning emotional awareness
6. Learning how to dialogue

The Learning How to Learn chapter (Carroll and Gilbert, 2008: 66-72) is principally concerned with raising coachee awareness about learning styles and becoming more self-aware as to what works for them. In this sense it is not clear what skills are being suggested as the emphasis seems to be more on communicating the need to be aware of different styles and approaches. When considering Learning How to Give and Receive Feedback (73 -83), Carroll and Gilbert seem to mix together being able to give and receive feedback when in a coaching session with being able to give and receive feedback as an executive. Once again, it is not made clear what is distinctive about being a skilled coachee as opposed to being generally effective with feedback. Similarly, when examining Learning Realistic Self Evaluation (84-89), there is much in this chapter that is generic to evaluation and again there is a conflating of executive behaviour and coachee behaviour here. For example, some questions are offered based on the work of Gilbert and Sills (1999), borrowed from the coaching supervision literature. Carroll and Gilbert (2008: 87) offer these to the executive coachee and invite them to use this in other areas of work:

"These questions are based on some of the findings that highlight the qualities inherent in effective coaching. You can draw up a similar list for any task in terms of the standards for that piece of work and then use the criteria as a guideline for realistic self-evaluation"

Learning How to Reflect and Learning Emotional Awareness (90-105) are similar to the first skill in that they are essentially about being aware of relevant theories of reflection and emotion and the key skills as applied in a coaching relationship are not clearly spelt out. Learning How to Dialogue (106-110) is seemingly the most amenable to coachee skill articulation but again, there is more of an emphasis on imparting knowledge on what different sorts of dialogue are possible, as opposed to what specific skills, processes or techniques a coachee might bring to a coaching session. Nevertheless, Carroll and Gilbert's (2008) work lends support to the view that coachee

knowledge of coaching processes can have a significant impact on the efficacy or otherwise of the coaching relationship.

In her analysis of coaching conversations, in Germany, Rettinger (2011)'s research into coaching conversations supports this view. This study is principally conducted through a discourse analysis of coaching conversations drawing on the concept of discourse identities (Zimmerman, 1998). In this account, she suggests that the principal roles of coach and coachee can be broken down into what she calls activity identities - smaller roles that each party plays within the main role of coach and coachee. In terms of coachee agency, what is interesting about her findings is that these roles are signifiers for the competence and identity of both parties, not just for the coach. One of the activity identities that the coachee is deemed to perform within this is that of expert in their own life, which reverses the usual role that the coach plays in terms of process expert. Hence, the client/coachee assumes the role of evaluator, problem teller and expert at certain stages in the conversation. Rettinger (2011), however, does not draw any conclusions about coachee skills on the basis of this field work, preferring, as others do, to focus on the activities of the coach:

"Such a development of sensitivity through the microanalysis of an interaction can help coaches to deepen their understanding and develop new competencies without prescribing normative laws of behaviour" (Rettinger, 2011: 443)

However, the ability to evaluate contributions from the coach, articulate a problem or issue effectively and to offer in depth expertise on one's own issues, motivations and drivers can be seen as skilled coachee activities that are important to the success of the coaching process. This view is also borne out by Bozer et al (2013) research into coachee characteristics for the effective sustainability of coaching. The study was conducted in Israel using an experimental research design, involving 72 coaches and 68 coachees - 29 peers and 28 supervisors were also involved in the study to ratify behavioural change in the coachees. The experimental group received coaching whilst the control group did not. All participants were given before and after surveys. The findings suggested that coachees who had a learning goal orientation and who were receptive to feedback (as evaluated by surveys) reported higher job performance as a result of coaching. Also, the levels of pre-coaching motivation to learn were

statistically significant. Whilst noting that the coachees in the study had "uniformly high levels of developmental self efficacy", the researchers fall short of making claims for skill levels of coachees, concluding instead that "the findings have given us tools by which organizations and coaches can work in partnership to design and deliver more effective coaching programs" (Bozer et al, 2013: 290). That said, this again lends support to the view that coaching discourse needs to include reference to the skilled contributions that coachees make to the coaching conversation and relationship. Audet and Couteret's (2012) study of a coaching scheme for entrepreneurs reveals similar findings in terms of coachee characteristics. As with Bozer et al (2013), the degree to which the coachees were deemed to be receptive to change and feedback was critical:

"The success of a coaching relationship appears to be explained by a set of factors or "winning conditions", some of which are more important than others, namely the entrepreneur's open attitude to change" (Audet and Couteret, 2012: 528)

This perspective on the skilled client/ coachee, is not limited to the coaching profession, however. In his text on counselling skills, Nelson-Jones (2002) argues for what he calls the skilled client model. As he asks (Nelson-Jones, 2002, p25), "if we are to have skilled helpers, counsellors and therapists, why not have clients too". His skilled client model is split up into three main stages: relating, understanding and changing. Relating refers to forming a collaborative working relationship between client and therapist; understanding refers to establishing a shared definition of the client's problem; Changing refers to achieving client change and the maintenance of that change. In turn, each of these main stages has sub-stages which are treated as phases. Within the model, Nelson-Jones examines each stage from the perspective of the therapist and the client. Whilst he refers to the model as a skilled client model, the main thrust of the skills examined in the model seem to be in terms of output from the therapeutic process, predominantly in terms of enabling the client to be self sufficient at the end of the process. However, there are examples in the model where Nelson-Jones alludes to process skills on the part of the client. For example, he argues that "clients can be very cooperative in providing additional information that helps them understand specific problems clearly" (Nelson-Jones, 2002: 36). At the same time, he acknowledges that "many clients, at the same time as being willing and eager to talk

about themselves, will economise on how much they reveal" (Nelson-Jones, 2002: 32). This lends weight to the view that clients are capable of helping or hindering the process of coaching rather than simply being passive recipients of the methodology put forward by the coach.

Egan (2014), in his text, "A Skilled Helper", makes similar points about enabling client self-efficacy to that of Nelson-Jones (2002):

"That is, helping at its best provides clients with tools to become more effective self-helpers. Therefore, although this book is about a process helpers can use to help clients, more fundamentally it is about a problem-management and opportunity-development process that clients can use to help themselves" (Egan, 2014: 9)

This principle of self helpers can be traced in root back to the work of Carl Rogers. In his text, A Way of Being, Rogers, (1980: 115) summarised what has become known as the person centred approach to therapy:

"Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self understanding, and for altering their self concepts, basic attitudes, and self directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided"

This perspective of the resourceful client also resonates with the work of writers on positive psychology such as Martin Seligman (Seligman 2002, 2011), Richard Layard (Layard 2005) and Robert Biswas-Diener and Ben Dean (Biswas-Diener and Dean, 2007). Positive psychology approaches such as these tend to focus on the strengths of individuals and being able to leverage these resources for the benefit of the individuals' wellbeing. At first, this notion of resourcefulness seems to be consistent with Inden's (1990) notion of agency. These resources, however, seem, implicitly to be based on the assumption that it is the therapist's/helper's responsibility to draw on these resources through their own skill. Hence, in some way the coachee is dependent on the coach to draw out these resources, which seems to undermine this apparent empowerment of the coachee. On the other hand, Hayes et al (2012), in their text on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) argue that human suffering and negative/ destructive thinking constitutes normal human behaviour. In relation to therapy, they



argue that clients often demonstrate skills and abilities that might militate against successful therapy in the first instance:

"Clients often come into therapy heavily fused with and prepared to defend a verbally constructed view of self that is rooted in the problem-solving mode of mind" (Hayes et al 2012: 222).

This 'conceptualised self, either about negative or positive views of self, can, they argue, be unhelpful in terms of causing narrowness and rigidity in the clients' repertoire of behaviours:

"ACT therapists work to help clients distinguish themselves from their conceptualised content, however good or bad that content may be" (Hayes et al, 2012, p223)

However, this analysis is also consistent with the notion that clients do have some agency in relation to the interventions of their helper. Nevertheless, this defending behaviour (seeking to adhere to the conceptualised self) can result in, at its extreme, a sense of disconnection from other people. Bowlby (1988, p38), writing about attachment theory in therapy, argues that, in some individuals, this induces a process of blocking themselves off from difficult or challenging feelings:

"So far from its being the routine exclusion of irrelevant and potentially distracting information that we engage in all the time and that is readily reversible, what are being excluded in these pathological conditions are the signals, arising from both inside and outside the person, that would activate their attachment behaviour and that would enable them both to love and to experience being loved"

Hence, what is being argued for here is that the pre-cursors to natural attachment are being overridden/ignored. Bowlby implies that this is an unconscious process which protects the client from embarrassment or threat. Egan (2014, p131) also agrees that these processes are important although suggests that this is a more conscious process:

"All of us have ways of defending ourselves from ourselves, from others, and from the world. We all have our little dishonesties. But they are two-edged swords. Although lies, whether white or not, may help me cope with difficulties - especially unexpected difficulties - in my interactions with others, they come with a price tag, especially if they become a preferred coping strategy"

This need to disconnect as a form of protection is referred to in Sennett (2012, p179). In his text on the politics of cooperation, he makes a comment about what he sees happening within modern society :

"A distinctive character type is emerging in modern society, the person who can't manage demanding, complex forms of social engagement and so withdraws."

This also seems to connect with Bowlby's (1988) notion of defensiveness and the individual's desire to protect themselves by resisting too much engagement. Like Egan, Heron (2001) argues that this sort of resistance is functional in that it protects the client from short term pain; he refers to this as "a resistance to the self creating process of unravelling the limiting effects of childhood pain" (Heron, 2001: 35). Similarly, Lapworth and Sills (2011) in their text on transactional analysis describe these sorts of defensive patterns as 'racketeering':

"It is the means by which we maintain the beliefs about ourselves, others and the world despite evidence to the contrary. In this way, we preserve the status quo and, in doing so, pay for it by limiting our lives" (Lapworth and Sills, 2011: 135).

This raises an interesting question in relation to coachee agency. The concept of agency implies active and conscious choice on the part of the individual exercising that agency. However, as can be seen from the preceding arguments made above, insights from the therapy literature suggest that resistance and protection are often unconscious. They nevertheless have as much of an impact on the helping conversation and relationship as those expressed consciously. Like the coaching literature does in relation to coaching, the therapy literature offers a range of perspectives and approaches to therapy - this similarity is unsurprising given that a lot of coaching approaches are derived from therapeutic roots. Dyden (2007) and Corsini and Wedding (2008), in their edited texts, both conduct broad reviews of the therapy landscape, featuring a range of contributions from experts in the different branches of therapy. Whilst there are some differences in emphasis, the two texts cover similar ground: psychoanalysis (Freud, Klein, Jung) , Alderian , Person Centred, Gestalt, Existential, Transactional Analysis, Cognitive, Behavioural, Integrative, Solution Focus. In both texts, the role that the therapist plays, like coaches in coaching texts, is

paramount. Hence, there is, in most approaches, relatively little attention paid to any coachee agency.

However, in Jungian analysis, the impact of the client on the process and, indeed on the therapist themselves, is seen as critical to its success. Douglas (2008: 121) describes Carl Jung's philosophy about transference and counter-transference and its implications for the therapeutic relationship:

"Rather than viewing therapy as something done by one person to another, Jung acknowledged that the therapist needs to be affected before transformation can occur in the patient. Jung emphasised the influence of the patient's unconscious on the analyst as well as the need for them to be open to this power. The therapist's own analysis and continued self-examination are essential if the therapist is going to maintain a beneficial role"

This view of Jung is supported by Stevens's (1994) synopsis of his work. Within this, he discusses the importance of the unconscious for Jung. Jung, according to Stevens, believed that the process of life fulfilment - Jung called this individuation - could be obtained by working with and confronting one's unconscious:

"What did he mean by confronting the unconscious? He experienced the unconscious as a living, numinous presence, the constant companion of every waking (and sleeping) moment. For him, the secret of life's meaning lay in relating this daemonic power in such a way as to know it" (Stevens, 1994: 38)

Stevens (1994) points out that Jung's approach to the unconscious and interpretation of dreams was quite different to that of his mentor, Sigmund Freud and was the source of their disagreements that followed. In that sense, Jung was quite critical of psychoanalysis from that point. However, Jung's patients in therapy were not necessarily typical of the range of those receiving therapy:

"In fairness to the psychiatric profession, however, it must be acknowledged that Jung's patients, once he had left the Burgholzli, were hardly run of the mill intake of psychiatric practice. Most of them were educated, well off and in the second half of life. A number of them were psychologically sophisticated in that they had already

received some form of psychotherapy before consulting him, and fair proportion of them had little that was psychiatrically wrong with them" (Stevens, 1994:129)

In some ways, therefore, we could view Jung's clients as skilled, due to their relative sophistication in terms of therapy. Furthermore, they had made an active, informed choice by engaging with therapy in this way. Jung, argues Stevens (1994), saw the role of therapy as a way of the individual confronting their unconscious and re-integrating aspects of themselves that they had suppressed or denied about themselves into their conscious world, so as to learn and develop from it. Again, this connects with the notion of coachee agency as being an active choice on the part of the coachee to face lessons and failings that they had preferred not to face in the past. A therapeutic alliance here, however, is conceived of as a partnership where both parties engage and are transformed by the process, rather than seeing the client as the recipient of the therapist's expertise. That said, this mutuality is still operating according to a methodology that is set by the therapist rather than by the client. Also, like the other approaches mentioned above, the context for the relationship is still one in which one party pays another for process help in relation (typically) to certain problems or issues that they are experiencing.

Western (2012) in his critical text on coaching and mentoring makes the link between therapy and coaching explicit by offering two concepts of the self: the wounded and the celebrated self. The wounded self is used to describe the way that society has conceived of an individual as "damaged, fragmented or emotionally hurt and is the domain of psychotherapists and psychologists" (Western 2012: 3). This he contrasts with a different discourse that is also present within society which he refers to as the celebrated self, that "offers a hopeful optimization of the self, the potential to grow and to improve our happiness and well being" (Western, 2012: 7). Western uses this basic conception of self to develop four dominant discourses of coaching, framed around the role that the coach takes in each of these contexts. In doing so, Western (2012, p126) makes a crucial point about the importance of looking at discourse:

"By revealing the discourses that shape our coaching practice, we are able to understand how they influence us, and by revealing them we regain some agency as to how we act within them, as individuals and collective bodies"

Here, Western is advocating a more conscious engagement with the discourses that shape behaviour within coaching. He provides a framework which seeks to position four discourses of coaching in terms of stance of the coach, the approach taken, the aim of the coach and what the coachee works on (Western, 2012: 210). In terms of the work that coachee does, Western provides a useful typology by equating the coaching discourses with the focus that a coachee takes within that perspective. For instance, within what he calls the Soul Guide discourse, he argues that the coachee is principally working on their inner self, in search of their authentic self, focusing on identity, meaning and personal values. This is contrasted with the Psy Expert role approach, where the coachee works with psychological tools, processes and models (offered by the coach) to engender changes in thinking or behaviour in order to achieve their goals, i.e. working on the outer self. Bringing in the organisational perspective, Western (2012) recognises a managerial discourse which is focused on getting the best results, within a work context, for the coachee's team and organisation - this is referred to as working on the role-self. The fourth area of discourse Western refers to as the Network-Coach discourse where the coachee works more systemically across networks and recognises the power within these networks to influence and transform the workplace and possibly beyond- this work is referred to as the coachee working on their networked self. From a critical perspective, he is calling for a more conscious and active engagement with the discourses so as to afford the individual more agency in terms of their coaching relationships and processes.

In summary, therefore, an examination of coachee agency, within the context of coach dominated discourse, has revealed that, although limited, there are writers and researchers who have explored the possibility of coachee agency within coaching. What has emerged are process skills and behaviours that coachees can and do use to influence the process, some of which seem conscious and others unconscious. What is clear is that there is relatively little attention paid to the role of the coachee in terms of their agency or the role that they play. I will argue, in the next section, that this is for reasons fundamentally linked to power and control, both in society but particularly within the coaching profession.

Power: Uses and Mis-Uses

Power and individual agency are critical to understanding coaching and the way that the role of the coachee has been understood and conceptualised. It is important to understand why and how this power has been exercised and what its impact has been in order to make a contribution to coachee skills and agency within the coaching discourse. However, as Welman & Bachkirova (2010: 140) have argued, "the topic of power has been largely ignored in the coaching literature".

Sociologists have long been interested in how power is exercised within societies and within organisations (Lukes, 2005). More recently, scholars have been interested in what this means for the notion of self and individual identity. Giddens (1991, pi) in his text on modernity and identity argues that the link between modern institutions e.g. society, government, work organisations and the individual needs to be recognised:

"Modernity must be understood on an institutional level: yet the transmutations introduced by modern institutions interlace in a direct way with individual life and therefore with the self"

In other words, institutions such as work organisations, government agencies and public services can be viewed as the mechanisms by which individual behaviour can be influenced. The emergence of professional bodies in coaching can also be seen in this light. Garvey (2011: 60) argues that professional bodies can be seen as making a power play by seeking to influence coaching in this way:

"Professionalization usually involves the creation of a professional body that has the function of controlling, vetting and objectifying the trade or occupation by differentiating itself as a body with integrity and competence. A professional body also defines those who are amateurs, unqualified, or of lower standing. In this way, the concept of professionalization could be viewed either positively as creating standards of membership and practice or negatively as a narrow elitists group that excludes. Both positions are power plays"

This influence is exercised in a direct way by professional bodies through their establishment of coaching standards (see for example European Mentoring and Coaching Council code of ethics

<http://www.emccouncil.Org/src/ultimo/models/Download/4.pdf> and the

International Coach Federation Ethics:

<http://www.coachfederation.Org/about/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=854andnavItemNumber=634> )

Each of the main professional bodies, with a presence in the UK, have developed codes of conduct and ethics statements which seek to prescribe the way in which professionals offering coaching, mentoring and supervisory services should operate. In this sense, these codes and statements can be seen as attempts to normalise coaching practice. They cover issues such as the maintenance of professional boundaries, confidentiality and personal integrity, as well as offering complaints procedures for clients and sponsors, where these standards may be breached.

As Garvey et al (2014: 227) further argue, it is possible to see this professionalization as working to "an agenda of self interest" where professional coaches have an interest in restricting the supply of coaches (less competition for business) and emphasising their elite status (ability to raise the price). Lane et al (in Cox et al, 2014: 383) also argue that professionalization has brought with it a hegemonic discourse where, due to published and ratified methodologies, coachees are required to provide data in a certain format so as to fit with the coach's methodology. They give the example of "the miracle question" from solution focused coaching (Berg and Szabo, 2005) as an example of this phenomenon. Of course, as Gray (2011) suggests, the professionalization of coaching cannot simply be characterised as being about the self-interest of members of coaching bodies. A key aspect of professional body practice is to quality assure the competence to practice of its members so as to protect the client/ coachee and to provide a set of standards by which that competence can be assessed.

In similar vein, in relation to therapy, Rose (1999: 217) argues that "over less than fifty years the territory of the psyche has been opened up for exploration, cultivation and regulation in many ways and along many channels"

He argues that - which writers such as Lasch (1980) describe as the culture of narcissism and Sennett (1998) as the corrosion of character -has led to a situation where "the links that once bound each person into the chain of all members of the community have been severed" and that "the possibility has emerged of everyone

living a truly private life" (Rose, 1999: 220). Rose suggests that, given what he sees as a decline in community, individuals have turned inwards and use mechanisms such as therapy to regulate themselves and their emotions rather than seeing a function for community in doing so. However, rather than arguing that there should be a return to an older, traditional sense of society and community, Rose, instead, points to what he calls "the fabrication of the autonomous self" as the key issue to be addressed (Rose, 1999: 221). He suggests that modern institutions and professions construe individuals as the focus for their exercise of expert power (French and Raven, 1962). He describes the sense of self thus:

"The self does not pre-exist the forms of its social recognition; it is a heterogeneous and shifting resultant of the social expectations targeted upon it, the social duties accorded it, the norms accorded to which it is spoken about and about which it learns to account for itself in thought and speech" (Rose, 1999: 222)

Hence, he is arguing that society's modern institutions and norms serve to influence the self but in a way that encourages the individual, via the notion of an autonomous self - sufficient identity, to take personal responsibility for self-regulation and self-discipline:

"The political subject is now less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body, than an individual whose citizenship is to be manifested through the free exercise of personal choice among a variety of marketed options" (Rose, 1999: 230)

Rose argues that, as a result of the loss of community, therapeutic professions i.e. psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy have developed to "restore to individuals the capacity to function as autonomous beings in the contractual society of the self" (Rose, 1999: 231), when they are unable to function as autonomous, private self. Building on Rose's (1999) work, Western (2012: 97) argues that the rise in the demand for coaching can be seen as a new expertise that can be used to "satisfy the alienated employees, lonely leaders at the top and managers struggling with increasingly complex work that demanded their cognition and attention".



Rose (1999) suggests that, as the choice to consume such services is made by the individual, this is construed by some as being an autonomous choice. Bauman (2005:35) makes a similar point when he discusses what he calls "the vocation of the consumer" in relation to modern society. In this sense, there appears to be no obvious evidence of a power play on the part of individuals or groups, as individuals are choosing to purchase coaching and therapy services and there is no sign of co-ercion. However, as Lukes (2005: 27) points out, the exercise of power need not result in conflict for it to be a power play:

"To put the matter sharply, A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have - that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?"

Jerome Bruner (1979:132) refers to this influence as cultural control and draws a similar conclusion:

"Once we have determined how men shall perceive and structure the world with which they have commerce, we can then safely leave their actions to them - in the sense that, if they believe themselves to standing before a precipice, they will not step over it unless they intend suicide"

Seen in this light, the rise in organisational interest in coaching described by many commentators (e.g. Garvey et al, 2014, Cox et al 2014, Passmore et al, 2013) can be reframed as a mechanism for the control of employees on the part of powerful stakeholders within organisations. Nielsen and Norreklit (2009) examined this phenomenon in their research. They conduct a critical discourse analysis of two well-known coaching texts: Hunt and Weintraub (2002) and Anderson and Anderson (2005). They argue, from a critical theory perspective that the ways in which coaching is written about in these texts has a particular way of construing the coachee and the coach, within which managerial control and discipline is retained on the part of the organisation:

"Executive coaching signals that the coach has an authentic interest in helping the manager and promises the development of his potentialities. However, whatever room there is, it is not a free room for self-realisation; it is a room controlled by the organisation. Consequently, while management coaching as represented in employee coaching may result in the disciplining of the body, i.e. action, management coaching as represented in executive coaching may result in the disciplining of the spirit, i.e. values" (Nielsen and Norreklit, 2009: 212)

The work also resonates with the works of Townley (1994, 2008) where she uses a Foucauldian analysis of power to examine the role that organisations play in controlling and influencing the individual. In her text on HRM practices (Townley, 1994:124-5), she likens mentoring to the religious confession, which encourages "the renunciation of one's own self and will". Like Nielsen and Norreklit (2009), she is arguing that coaching and mentoring have the potential to allow the agency of the individual coachee to be subordinated to that of the organisational agenda, as represented by the coachee's line manager. Reissner and Du Toit (2011), on the other hand, argue that all three types of stakeholder in an organisational coaching programme - the organization, coach and the coachee - have the opportunity to influence the discourse in different ways. In their conceptual paper, they put forward the idea of 'storyselling' in coaching as opposed to storytelling. In this framework, the coachee involves themselves in selling a version of their personal story, firstly, to the coach based on the view of themselves that they want the coach to see and then to the organisation of the change in them and their behaviour. These discourses may compete with others put forward by the other stakeholders, and, as Reissner and Du Toit (2011) point out, the way may be open for manipulation and abuse of these stories as a result. This idea of competing discourses and manipulation of agendas features in the work of Colley (2003) on mentoring. Examining social inclusion mentoring schemes, Colley points out, using a number of case studies, that mentees in the study were adept at influencing the process and content of the mentoring conversations to fit their own needs, even though there were strong alternative discourses coming from other stakeholders e.g. government agencies, the mentors. Colley (2003: 100) is careful not to overstate this mentee agency, given the strength of other discourses, but, nevertheless, argues that "young people can exercise power

rather than being passive recipients of mentoring". This editing and selling of stories is evident in several, more recent, research projects such as the work of Schwabenland (2015) in her work on voluntary agencies in war zones so as that outcomes might be more palatable to funding stakeholders or Kwon et al's (2014) study on discursive strategies that senior stakeholders use in team meetings to achieve sub-group agendas. However, this only deals with a deliberate and conscious use of power by individuals or groups. Lukes (2005) makes the point that power can be exercised through inaction or lack of awareness of consequences, which can prevent conflicts or challenges from ever being consciously raised in the first place. Applying this to the purchase of coaching services, it could be argued that, by undervaluing coachee skills and qualities, powerful stakeholders are limiting the efficacy of these interventions. However, these stakeholders may believe that their actions are in the best interests of the coachees or may simply not be aware of any negative consequences. Morgan (2006: 323), in his text on organisational theory, acknowledges that, often, perceived manipulation/ exploitation can be systemic, accidental and/or reversible. Nevertheless, the individuals' autonomy and agency are being curtailed, even if this is not deliberate. This is certainly reflected in Colley's (2003) account of engagement mentoring programmes, where mentors and mentees' behaviour is constrained and regulated by systemic forces rather than a single or group of powerful individuals. Individual mentors are, argues, Colley as much constrained by the system as the mentees are. However, it is nevertheless noticeable, from Colley's (2003) account, that mentees, to some extent do manage to evade these pressures of employability and exercise their own agency in relation to the help that they receive. This individual resistance can also be seen in Dey and Steyaert's (2014) research into social entrepreneurship and ethics, where, by problematising tensions between managerialism and service delivery, the individual entrepreneur retains their sense of self and successfully avoids their activities being prescribed by other agencies.

In summary, therefore, the exercise of power in relation to coaching raises some important questions about power, control and hegemonic discourses. I have argued that organisations, professional bodies and other stakeholders have influenced the prevailing discourse about coaching involving who does what and that this can be done consciously and deliberately or may be due to systemic factors that cannot easily be

attributed to one individual or a group of individuals. In the chapter summary section below, I will use these ideas around power in conjunction with the other two themes discussed above, to argue for an approach to field work which explores coachee agency, skills and power within coaching conversations and relationships.

## Chapter Summary

By exploring selected literature under three main themes - privileging the coach; coachee agency; power: its uses and misuses - some conclusions can be drawn from this literature. Firstly, the literature on coaching clearly emphasises the coach's actions and skills. This is partly due to the notion that a significant part of that literature is being written expressly for practising professional coaches or those who aspire to this role. All of the books and articles examined here claim to place the coachee or client as being central to the coaching process. However, as I have argued above, the vast majority of those writers discuss the role that the coachee plays as principally one of providing the issues and the content of the coaching sessions. There is a significant emphasis placed on the coach working as an enabler/ facilitator for the coachee in terms of taking action in their own lives and work. However, in the work of the majority of writers, there is an assumption that the coachee passively accepts the role of the coach as the provider of the process and methodology of the coaching intervention. Hence, for the most part, the coachee's role in the process remains silent in the coaching literature. Nevertheless, when I examined selected passages from the practitioner literature, in particular, I argued that there is evidence of coachee process skills within these examples which go unacknowledged by the writers themselves e.g. engaging with metaphor, and articulating goals. Instead, the writers tend to point to the skilful questioning by the coach whilst failing to acknowledge the corresponding skilful part that the coachee plays in these conversations. That said, some writers do acknowledge coachee skills but these tend to be framed in terms of the degree of openness to coach help - 'coachability' - or the degree to which coachees, either consciously or unconsciously resist the interventions of the coach. This privileging of the helper is not limited to the coaching world - the world of counselling and psychotherapy, from which many of the brands of coaching are derived, appears similar in focus. The client, in this context, is similarly viewed as the recipient of the helper's process. Two possible exceptions to this is the approach taken

to Jungian psychotherapy (Stevens, 1994) in which the helper is also transformed by the relationship, and narrative therapy (e.g. White, 2007), where the client is seen as the author/narrator. But even in these two cases, the client is engaged in a process which is determined by the helper and where little room is afforded to client agency. Some writers on therapy - such as Casement (1985), (1990), Howe (1993) and Nelson-Jones (2002) - and in coaching, like de Haan, (2008), de Haan et al, (2010) - do specifically address client/coachee skills. However, these skills are seen as the output or result of the helping process, as a result of the coach's developmental skills, rather than as an input to the process by the helpee. However, when examining both the coaching and the therapy literatures, I have argued that there is some evidence in both to suggest that coachees (and clients) can have some influence over the process in terms of what they choose to engage with and how they engage with it. Nevertheless, this agency appears under-acknowledged and explored in these literatures for the most part. I argue that the reason for both privileging the coach and the relative lack of emphasis on coachee agency is due to reasons of power and control. This power and control comes from four main sources: the prevailing discourses in therapy and coaching; public institutions; work organisations ; professional bodies. Those who operate in each of these areas have a vested interest in controlling the individual. The prevailing discourses come from writers (including myself) and practitioners in coaching and therapy, who wish to underline their status as experts in their fields and disseminate that knowledge to prospective entrants in that market. Professional bodies, operated principally by experienced practitioners in the field, wish to restrict entry into the profession to ensure their elite status but espouse to be guardians of quality. Key stakeholders in work organisations see coaching as a means of controlling the behaviour of employees and retaining their talent by ensuring that the organisations' voice is dominant in these discussions, whereas government agencies (Rose, 1999) encourage a view of self in society that seems to be autonomous and entrepreneurial but one in which the array of choices are limited and controlled (Lukes, 2005). Following Western (2012), I argue that, by reframing the discourse on coaching, to focus on coachee skills and agency, it is possible to emancipate the coaching world in terms of coachee contribution. This will have important consequences for coaching scheme design and participant development. Therefore in

order to make this contribution, the field work I undertook needed to address the following research objectives:

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches which influences coaching?

a. How do they use conversational devices and strategies?

b. What impact do these have on coaching process?

c. What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

The way that these objectives and research questions have been explored will be now examined in the Research Methodology Chapter.

## Research Methodology Chapter

### Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the research questions that have been identified and explored in the first two chapters and, using the research methodology literature, I will explain and justify my chosen research design. As outlined in Chapter 1, a critical part of this is the inclusion of my thoughts and experiences as a coach, coachee, researcher, client, supervisor and supervisee. I will therefore explain my position on truth and philosophical commitments to research, followed by a justification of my research design, which is neither grounded theory nor action research in a purist sense, but which draws on both to form a hybrid approach that is consistent with my philosophical commitments. Finally, I will examine the specific research methods used, justifying the place of each in the research process, as well as examining the data analysis process followed. I will conclude the chapter with how the findings and analysis will be presented in the next two data analysis chapters.

### Truth and Philosophical Commitments

As argued in Chapter 1, I have engaged with this research project at a number of levels. Firstly, at an individual level, I recognise that the findings have implications for me in a range of roles:

- Coach
- Coachee
- Supervisor
- Supervisee
- Client
- Researcher.

As an academic and researcher, a primary motivation is similar to Alvesson and Wilmott's (2003:11) aspiration to "break the mythic spell of conventional management theory and practice to which people in organizations, managers included, are routinely subjected" but focusing particularly on coaching rather than management. For me, an important aspect of the research design is that it raises the possibility of challenging the prevailing discourses in coaching.

The study involves conducting research in a context which I have played an active part in creating over the last fifteen years - I have led an MSc in Coaching in Mentoring for eight years and have been an active coach, researcher and consultant in the UK since 1999. Because of that, any research I do within coaching must take account of my role as an active participant in the development of the coaching profession within the UK. This agenda has significant implications in terms of my personal reflexivity (Holland, 1999, Alvesson et al, 2008) and raises the importance of my critical reflexivity as a researcher. It is important for me to consider how my relative insider status in the coaching and mentoring world will affect this research process. In particular, I recognise, as argued in the Literature Review Chapter, that I have been a contributor to the prevailing discourse which I have critiqued, through co-authorship of books, attendance at conferences and delivery of courses. In addition to my own roles, I recognise that this research has implications for the professionalization of coaching, particularly in terms of how coachees are seen within this context. This is not just in terms of a critique regarding self-interest (see p47) but also in terms of what rights and responsibilities a coachee may have.

Alvesson et al (2008) address the issue of critical reflexivity at length. They argue that, rather than there being one view of critical reflexivity, it is more appropriate to talk of different reflexivities within the way research is written up and described. In terms of action research, for example, one of the temptations that researchers must guard against is to privilege one person or group's account above another or indeed to privilege the primary researcher's account above that of the collaborator/co-researchers in the study. Following Alvesson et al (2008), one way that researchers choose to deal with this dilemma is to use multiple voices and perspectives to ensure that these tendencies are successfully resisted. In the context of my study, this involves including the voices of coachees and coaches. However, there remains the issue of how to integrate and deal with a diverse and different set of voices about a particular phenomenon. In their article on evaluating qualitative management research, Johnson et al (2006:134) argue for

"using the appropriate evaluation criteria in a reflexive manner... to enable different sets of evaluation criteria to be contingently deployed so that they fit the researcher's mode of engagement"



Therefore, they acknowledge that there are different ways in which we might decide whether something is true or trustworthy or not. Were this not the case, then there would be no need for a contingent view of evaluation as all phenomena could be evaluated against the same criteria. In a similar vein, Holland (1999:481) has argued for the importance of human reflexivity as being "at the center of any method of appraising human existence, including the accounts of that existence provided explicitly by theorists or metatheorists". At the core of his argument lies a critical discussion of the work of Burrell and Morgan (1978), Kuhn (1962), amongst others, in order to call for breaking away from dominant mindsets of individual specialisms/disciplines. Again, this seems to assume the existence of versions of truth/reality which are contrary to each other. Furthermore, Morgan's (1986) work on metaphors in organizational theory, like Mintzberg et al's (2009) text, *Strategy Safari*, seems again to acknowledge the possibility of different perspectives on different phenomena. In the context of a study of coaching, this might involve including, for example, not just psychological perspectives on coaching, but those which draw on organisational theory and aspects of sociology (e.g. power, resistance and change).

Holland (1999) identifies several different sorts of reflexivity:

- Reflexivity One - local reflexivity within context of current paradigm
- Reflexivity Two a - two paradigms are used against each other to highlight contradictions
- Reflexivity Two b - a range of paradigms are used to analyse and challenge assumptions e.g. Morgan's (1986) metaphors
- Reflexivity Three - moving between sociological paradigms from individual through to implications for society
- Reflexivity Four - transdisciplinary reflexivity not bound up with particular paradigms or disciplines and focused on emancipation

As I will argue below, an important aspect of this study is that it offers an alternative to the prevailing discourse within coaching. Hence Holland's (1999) fourth category makes sense in terms of personal reflexivity. However, I recognise that it is, in practice, incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to completely escape a particular paradigm.

Furthermore, with each paradigm comes a set of truth commitments and knowledge constituting assumptions that will influence the way that I see the coaching world and my role within it. As I have suggested above, coaching, given its roots in counselling and therapy, is informed by psychological approaches to it. Therefore, by engaging with alternative paradigms (e.g. sociological, organisational) as part of my engagement with theory, I hoped to move closer to Reflexivity 4, described above.

In summary, then, given these different and potentially contradictory views about what the nature of truth and reality is in general, and how this applies to business and management research in particular, it is important for any researcher to have an answer to the question: what is truth? This is because, as Johnson and Duberley (2000:8) argue,

"in any discipline, profession, occupation or everyday activity where knowledge claims are routinely made, epistemology contributes by clarifying the conditions and limits of what is construed as justified knowledge"

and that

"no-one can stand outside epistemological processes, whether they be researchers or managers".

We all make judgements about what we think is warranted knowledge about something, and have rules and criteria for doing so. These are things that are particularly important for researchers to be aware of as researchers are explicitly engaged in creating knowledge about phenomena. If the researcher is unable to articulate and justify their own approach to generating knowledge, then this raises the possibility of a disparity between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris and Schon, 1996) with regard to research i.e. claiming to research in one way and acting as a researcher in a different, possibly contradictory way. Furthermore, a failure to be clear and consistent about one's approach to research and assumptions about the phenomena under investigation is unlikely to be persuasive to anyone, whatever their epistemological and ontological commitments. I will therefore seek to articulate and justify what I see as my core commitments to research within the context of my study.

Whilst I am sympathetic to the dangers of premature theory building, the idea that data is somehow 'revealed' in a theory-neutral way does not seem plausible. As argued above, I am not and can never be a neutral observer of a coaching conversation or relationship. Inevitably, I bring with me fifteen years of experience of working in the area which I can never escape from. Arguably, it would not be helpful to try. This is because, by utilising this knowledge, I can envisage interventions that may not be possible without this knowledge. In this sense, I am clear that I espouse a subjectivist epistemology (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Following Locke's (1996) discussion of provocation in grounded theory, my knowledge and experience of coaching allows me to ask questions of the data that others may be unable to do, who might lack these experiences. More than that, however, I believe that I have a responsibility to question and challenge dominant discourses, thus enabling other alternative discourses to come to the fore. In this sense, my approach is located in the field of critical management studies (Adler et al, 2007), which emphasises

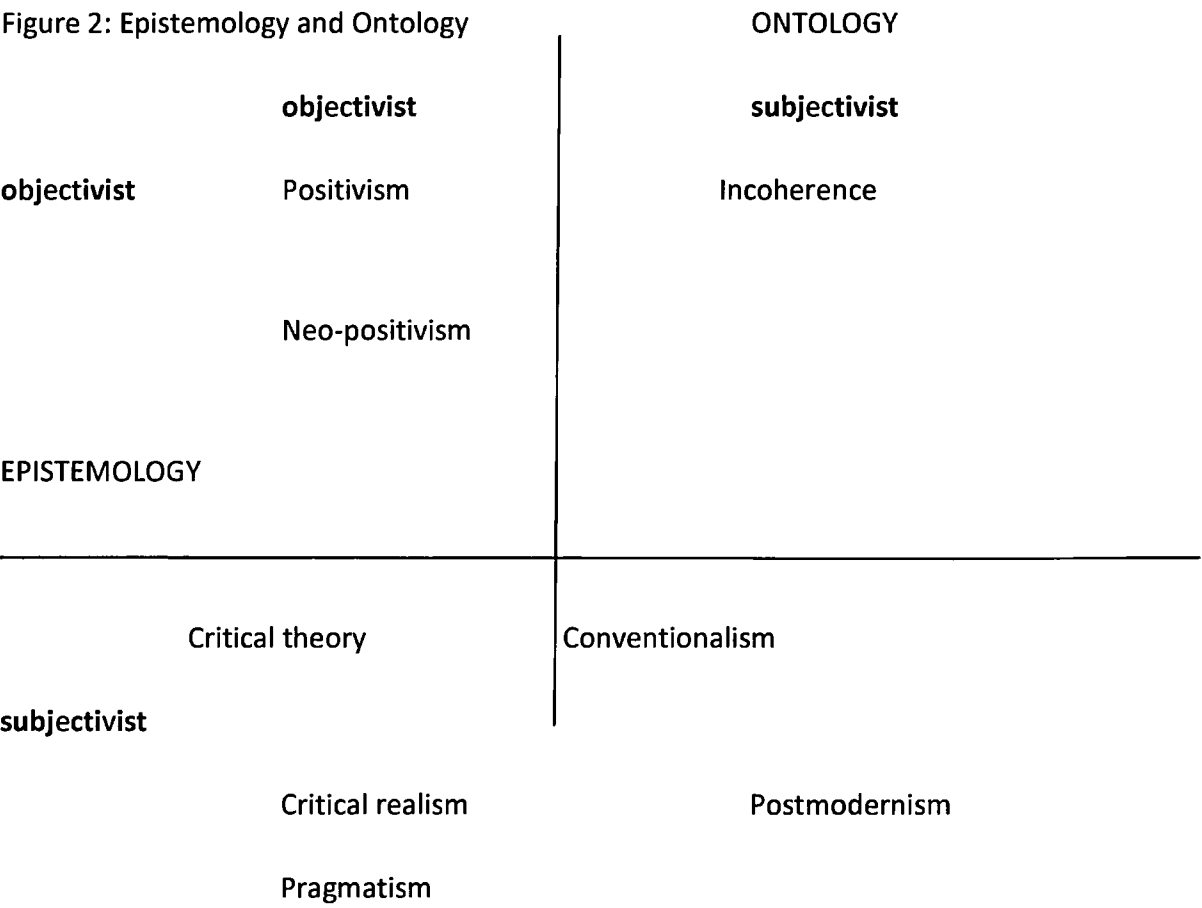
"resisting technicistic and objectivistic views; drawing attention to asymmetric power relations and discursive closures associated with taken-for-granted assumptions and ideologies; exploring the partiality of shared and conflictual interests; and paying careful attention to the centrality of language and communication" (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2003:16).

Arguably, I have a vested interest in the language and frameworks of the coaching profession and also that of an academic. Inevitably, what I notice about coaching practices will be subject to those values, language and experience and I can never hope to escape these. However, I can seek to render them explicit and accessible to the reader so that they may interpret the findings and draw conclusion drawn in the light of those assumptions.

Following Johnson and Duberley's (2000) discussion of the Enlightenment project and the birth of positivism, it is possible to see the rhetoric of the coaching profession as being almost quasi-religious in terms of the uncritical acceptance of coaching as being 'a good thing'. As I have suggested in the Literature Review, one reading of the lack of attention paid to role of the coachee in this discourse is that much of the literature is

written by practising coaches seeking to perpetuate coaching as a market through which they can earn a living. A view of the profession which accounts also for coachee skills might undermine the role that coaches play and the importance they have and may possibly shift funding and attention away from buying in external coaches towards helping individual coachees to make the most of whatever coaching they experience or have, whoever delivers it. Therefore, in this sense I would see my commitments being more towards emancipation than to regulation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). For me, this means that a postmodern position on coaching is not appropriate either. This is for two reasons. Firstly, postmodernists, following Gray (2009:26) "reject any notion of social 'emancipation', emphasizing instead multiplicity, ambiguity, ambivalence and fragmentation". They tend to focus on how meanings become constructed, using processes of genealogy and deconstruction in order to reject what Johnson and Duberley (2000) acknowledge to be the idea of a grand or meta narrative. The difficulty with postmodernism, as they recognise, is that by rejecting all truth claims as dubious - including those interested in social emancipation - they run the risk of sanctioning "a conservative disinterestedness that tacitly supports the status quo by engendering a disempowering silence about current practices as this relativistic dimension denies any possible grounds for critique" (Johnson and Duberley, 2000:113).

However, whilst I espouse, as argued above, a subjectivist epistemology, it is also important to consider the ontological assumptions I am making, in relation to this piece of coaching research. Johnson and Duberley (2000: 180) put forward a framework (see Figure 3) which represents their attempt to deal with issues of ontology and the relationship with epistemology. Gill and Johnson (2006:227) define ontology as being "the study of the essence of phenomena and the nature of their existence". Thus, ontology is concerned with the nature of reality.



Source: Johnson and Duberley (2000: 180)

For those with a subjectivist ontology, the world does not exist independently of its social construction by human beings whereas those with an objectivist ontology see the world as existing independently of their apprehension of it. Once again, returning to the study in question, I would concede that, whilst I can never know for certain that coaching exists independently of my sense-perception of it, I assume that it does and

act as if it does. By example, whilst I recognise that a coaching scheme is a social construction by human beings, once the scheme has been set up, it has an extra-individual status that has the power to influence the behaviour and thinking of those who constructed it as well as others who did not. Therefore it has a 'real' ontological status.

That does not mean that techniques like deconstruction and genealogy, often more closely associated with postmodernism, should be cast aside, however. In fact, I see considerable merit in adopting a critical approach to coaching and the grand narratives that are associated with it. Indeed, Deetz's (2003) work on critical theory applications to management uses Foucauldian analysis (like Townley, 1994) and applies this to Human Resource Management. However, adopting a critical approach to dominant discourses does not have to mean adopting a postmodernist stance. In the same way, adopting an objectivist ontology does not imply a rejection of a social constructionist approach to knowledge.

Darwin (2010) has done some useful work on what he terms 'alethic pluralism' which provides a helpful summary of different theories of truth and trustworthiness. He argues there are four different philosophies on what it means to know the truth about something. Applying these to my study in general, there are four possible approaches I could take with regard to how I will establish truth claims for this research:

- Correspondence - what is said about coachees must be true if it corresponds with what can be seen in the 'real' world
- Coherence - what is said about coachees must be true if the claims made seem plausible and internally consistent
- Consensus - what is said about coachees must be true if there is consensus between people about what it does
- Pragmatism - what is said about coachees must be true if it works/is practically adequate

As I have argued above, the aim of my research is develop an alternative discourse about coaching which includes coachee skills. However, I am not attempting to prove or generate a grand theory about coachees by seeking to establish correspondence

between that theory and the real world as, with a subjectivist epistemology, I am rejecting a theory neutral way of accessing this world. Neither am I seeking to experiment with a new approach to coaching to see if it works in a practical way. Rather, I am seeking, by engaging in field work to develop some theoretical insights that are plausible and consistent but seem to be common within my sample hence my truth claims are tested by whether they show a consensus, are consistent and plausible with regard to this alternative discourse.

To summarise, my philosophical commitments are to a subjectivist epistemology and an objectivist ontology, which are consistent with a critical management studies approach to research and the goals of unsettling discursive closures associated with taken-for-granted assumptions and ideologies about coaching; exploring the partiality of shared and conflictual interests and paying attention to the centrality of language in the coaching process. I recognise that personal reflexivity is important, given my commitments to emancipation and so making truth claims about coachee skills needs to be based on a combination of coherence and consensus theories of truth. Hence, by drawing from a range of discipline areas (as I have argued in the Literature Review Chapter), I will seek to enhance my personal reflexivity in relation to the knowledge claims that are made as a result.

## Research Design

Whilst this research draws on central tenets of both action research and grounded theory, it follows neither in the purist sense. Below, I will elaborate on how the research strategy both draws upon and departs from the underpinning practices and assumptions of both grounded theory and action research, justifying my choices against the backdrop of my stated philosophical assumptions, topic and research questions.

As I have argued above, and in previous chapters, a discourse of coaching which includes coachee skills and discursive strategies seems to be important and thus a way of accessing those coachee skills and understanding their impact on coaching conversations is central to the research design. The approach I chose to undertake

draws on a grounded theory approach (although I prefer to refer to it as a grounded approach, rather than as pure grounded theory) in that I wanted to work with coaches and coachees to examine the relationship between them by seeking to "actively construct the data, to get beyond static analysis to multiple layers of meaning" (Gray, 2009:23). More than that, though, I wanted to do this in a way that enabled me, in the words of Glaser and Strauss (1967, p i), to engage in "the discovery of theory from data" as opposed to testing or verifying existing theories. Following Locke (1986:241), I was comfortable with Strauss and Corbin's (1998: 63) view of research in this vein, which sees "researchers as interpreters of the data they study who can build good complex theories by actively 'opening up' the data to discovery". In Strauss and Corbin's (1998) position, I recognised my role as researcher to be an active interpreter of the data. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that using language such as "the discovery of theory from data" has positivist overtones, which suggest a theory-neutral approach to accessing data, which I am not comfortable with. However, I saw Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach lying in contrast to the way Glaser's approach to grounded theory is portrayed in Locke's work, with its emphasis on verification and keeping a distance from those being studied. These two features (verification and distance) seem to have positivistic overtones which I find both unhelpful and unrealistic in the context of my study. Given that I am significantly embedded and involved in the coaching world, and that, in addition, I saw my own reflexivity as an integral part of the research process, it was important that the research design reflected this. However, the principle of engaging iteratively with the data was a principle, embedded in grounded theory that I wanted to retain in my own research.

Grounded theory as understood by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) is concerned with "the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of the data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:62). According to Gray (2009: 503), Strauss's approach to grounded theory - which Glaser (1992), his former writing partner disagreed with - can be summarised in the following way:

- ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions, keeping in mind the original objectives of the research study. The intention here is to establish whether the data fit with these objectives. There may be occasions when new



or unanticipated results emerge from the data, an outcome that is entirely appropriate

- Analyse the data minutely, but also include as many categories, examples and incidents as possible
- Frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical account. As the data being coded, ideas or theoretical perspectives may arise. It is essential that these are noted immediately otherwise they may well be forgotten
- do not assume the analytical relevance of any traditional variable such as age, gender, social class etc. until its relevance emerges from the data. This is particularly so if the impact of an expected variable does not emerge - this result must be accepted.

For me, it was important that I was able to engage with coaching practice in relation to what coachees do within coaching conversations and to be able to refine and revisit those insights as the research progressed. This was important because, as I have argued in my review of the literature, the role that coachees play in coaching is relatively muted, with few research studies addressing this issue. Hence, it was important to generate insights from the data that could be used to add theoretical insight to the concept of the skilled coachee. These insights from the data could then be explored and compared as the research progressed.

Glaser (1992:373) however, argued that this sort of iterative approach is overly prescriptive and cautioned against "slipping into preconception instead of listening carefully to each incident in order to figure out what the research is truly a study of". For me, however, the pointed espoused neutrality that Glaser advocates is unrealistic and unpersuasive in the context of my own study. As I have argued extensively above, I do not consider myself to be neutral and am sceptical about the implicit objectivity that Glaser (1992) seems to be advocating for. However, this is not to suggest that even the Straussian approach to grounded theory is without its problems - there are several, as summarised by Bryman and Bell (2003:428) which I have adapted here:

1. It is debatable whether researchers are practically able to suspend their awareness of theory whilst collecting data whichever approach to grounded theory is used. Hence, despite intending to avoid early theorising, researchers

may only notice what their pre-conceptions permit. For example, although I am attempting to develop theoretical insights into the concept of the skilled coachee I am unable to divorce myself from my existing knowledge of the coach-centric literature that I analyse in the Literature Review. Therefore, whilst I still contend that it is important to begin with seeking to understand the skilled coachee by starting with practice, I recognise that I cannot sustain a claim that I have not been influenced by coaching theory. Rather, I have attempted to explicitly expose these influences and their implications throughout this research account through, for example, the inclusion of reflexive statements.

2. Much sponsored research requires the researcher to spell out what they are doing in the form of a tight research question which militates against the emergent approach espoused by grounded theorists. Although this research is not formally sponsored, I have nevertheless been required to articulate what my research objectives and questions are, for the purposes of the University, which has involved a provisional review of the literature in these areas. Therefore, whilst my initial intention was, principally, to work inductively and iteratively, on developing theoretical insights into the concept of the skilled coachee, following Blaikie (2007) I must accept that elements of this will involve testing existing theories and that pure induction is not feasible here.
3. Grounded theory methods are time consuming to operationalise particularly in the face of tight deadlines. In addition to this, as I will argue below, there are question marks as to whether operationalising grounded theory is an effective use of time.
4. It is debatable whether classical grounded theory actually generates theories, as opposed to concepts. However, my intention is to generate theoretical insights into the concept of the skilled coachee, rather than generate a theory. In addition, Bryman and Bell (2003) argue that the concepts generated from the approach may be useful in making broader connections but are often limited to the specific social context from which they came. It is therefore important, in terms of developing an alternative discourse on coaching that my research design moves beyond simply generating such concepts and moves

towards developing theoretical insights into coaching conversations and relationships that includes an alternative discourse on coachees' skills.

5. There is confusion and contradiction within the writing on grounded theory about the assumptions made by those writers regarding the status of the social world. Charmaz (2000: 521) argues for a constructionist position within which "the categories and concepts and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interaction within the field and questions about the data" which she contrasts with the 'objectivist' position of Glaser, Strauss and Corbin. However, Bryman and Bell argue that her position conflates an ontological and epistemological view of constructionism which can be confusing. Applying this to my coaching study, it is one thing to say that coaches and coachees co-construct their coaching environment but quite another to say that the coaching environment exists independently of them. As I have argued in the section above, I see the coaching conversation as socially constructed but then existing as something real that those individuals have co-created.

Hence, it is clear so far that, although classical grounded theory has some aspects that are useful to this study, there are other aspects of this approach that are less useful or appropriate. In order to explore its utility further, I will now examine the work of Fendt and Sachs (2008) and their critical exploration of grounded theory. Fendt and Sachs (2008) concur with many of the above criticisms of classical grounded theory when they use their doctoral supervision relationship of Fendt's PhD work to analyse its utility. In particular, they focus on the cost-benefit analysis aspect of the method. When supervising Fendt's work, they came to believe that a rigorous application of the coding method advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1998) tended to be a function of "a kind of false pride or inferiority complex of GTM [Grounded Theory Methodology] proponents, an attempt to justify an essentially interpretivist method vis-a-vis a research world still prejudiced in favour of positivism" (Fendt and Sachs, 2008:447). The result of this so-called inferiority complex, they argue, is that there is considerable pressure on researchers to rigorously apply the method even when there is little added value in that 'rigour':

"Based on our own experience, we do not believe that much of the endless rigid line-by-line coding brought the various consulted scholars any further than a less rigid form

of abstraction would have. On the contrary, the time spent by this exercise deadened their sharpness of perception, may have suppressed the use of their natural talents in the conduct of the study, and regular personal calls to reason were necessary to ensure the advancement of some dissertations" (Fendt and Sachs, 2008:447)

Therefore, a less rigid approach to coding the data would, in their view have yielded better results in terms of the study. Returning to the context of my coaching study, it was clear, whilst a grounded theory approach has some useful elements to it, I chose not to adopt such a classical grounded theory approach, given the truth and knowledge commitments articulated above. This is because, whilst it makes sense to properly examine the data, in order to ensure that I have drawn out its richness in terms of coachee behaviours, I do not see the need to mimic the practices of positivist research in order to demonstrate its utility. Like Fendt and Sachs (2008), I feel that the rigidity of the approach can outweigh some of the advantages. Furthermore, as I have suggested above, the language used to describe grounded theory does not always appear consistent with adopting a subjectivist epistemology. Nevertheless, in developing my own research design, there were elements of the grounded theory approach that I felt would be useful.

Firstly, because of its emphasis on an iterative approach, I felt that, as my understanding of the coachee discourse developed, I needed to recognise those developments and incorporate them into the theoretical insights being developed. Therefore, it seemed important to maintain a critical conversation between my developing theoretical insights and the fieldwork, as both progressed. Secondly, as I have argued in the Literature Review Chapter, there is a relative lack of theory in terms of the coaching literature that focuses on the coachee contribution. Hence, an inductive approach to the research has significant appeal in terms of my ability to shed some theoretical insight on coachee skills and behaviours within a coaching conversation. Finally, as I will argue below, the concepts of theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation are helpful in developing the research methods and data analysis processes. However, despite these advantages, I recognised that, given my truth and knowledge commitments above, I needed, additionally, to incorporate into my research design, the importance of challenging and transforming the discourse in coaching. In order to do that, I needed to draw from a different approach to research

design: action research. Next, I will therefore examine action research as an approach to inform my research.

Gray (2009:313) argues that, despite the many different modes of action research, all such approaches have three things in common:

1. Research subjects are seen as researchers or involved in a democratic partnership with the researcher
2. Research is seen as an agent of change
3. Data is generated from the direct experiences of research participants

In a similar vein, Bryman and Bell (2003:302) suggest that action research is "an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis", whilst Richie et al (2014: 67) see action research as "a collaboration between researchers and the population that is the focus of research, with a core aim being to enact positive change for those involved in the research process".

There seems to be some agreement that action research involves collaboration with research participants and that this involves making change as a result. Whilst I was not attempting to introduce a specific change into coaching sessions, I nevertheless recognised that (in order to understand it), any attempt to invite participants to reflect on or recount their experiences of coaching would constitute an intervention. Hence, I recognised that, in my study, I needed to have access, not only to participants' experiences of coaching but to their understandings of what these experiences meant to them and how they were understood. Furthermore, it was likely that this intervention would have some impact on the relationship. In that sense, action research, like grounded theory, was useful as a resource for research design principles, in that the planned change, in this context, would be my research intervention itself.

However, Gill and Johnson (2006) cite Rapaport's (1970: 499) definition of action research and identify some issues within it:

"Action Research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework"

In exploring this definition, Gill and Johnson (2006) raise the challenges within action research, such as the difficulty of joint collaboration where the main stakeholders in the research have different interests. For example, in my study, I recognised that participants who were professional business coaches were likely to be interested in how they can improve their coaching so that they can attract more business and income. However, as I have stated, I was not primarily interested in contributing to existing understandings of coach skills but, rather, in how the coachees' skills influence the process and the relationship and what this might look like. Similarly, coachees in the study were likely, in my view, to be more interested in how they might maximise personal benefit from their interactions with their coach and, thus, might be less interested in focusing on coachee skills and processes. In addition, it was possible to imagine that, by helping to develop more skilled coachees, who can work more effectively with their coaches, my intervention could reduce the demand for the coach's time and, hence, the coach's income. Whilst that might be seen to be in the coachee's interests, the coaches might not have seen this in the same way.

However, Gill and Johnson (2006) also explore the advantages of an action research frame in terms of the motivation and interest of the research participants. This point of view is supported by Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008:424) in their work on improving consumer welfare where they assert that "action research assumes that the act of doing research helps consumers develop new capacities and is empowering". My expectation in this study was that by inviting participants to reflect on their own coaching relationships, this might enhance the awareness of both coach and coachee, which might in turn, enhance the skills sets of both. Hence, it is important that the research makes a qualitative difference to the participants and works broadly in their interests (although this does assume that it is obvious what these interests are). In their article, Ozanne and Saatcioglu's (2008) articulated a number of assumptions about research philosophy that I felt were important for me to take account of.

To start with, they argue that action researchers see reality as socially constructed and thus amenable to change. Applying this to my study it can be argued that seeing coachees as passive recipients of their coaches' wisdom is a historical discourse, vested in the interests of the coaches and their need to appear as experts in order to get paid. By inviting participants to reflect on this in this way, it might, to use Ozanne and

Saatcioglu's (2008:425) words, open that discourse up to be "critiqued and changed on the basis of more-inclusive interests". Related to this, they also argue for a view of human beings, drawing on critical theory, where participants have the potential to change their circumstances but the dominant, powerful discourse gets in the way of their ability to (a) perceive the repressive effect of the discourse and (b) to challenge it. Ozanne and Saatcioglu's (2008) approach also considers issues of epistemology. They argue that because of its co-constructed nature, knowledge produced from research is jointly owned by the researchers and collaborators and should be shared with all of these stakeholders. In terms of this study, my hope was that by inviting participants to reflect on their coaching experience, I would intervene in a way that contributed positively to the interests of both coach and coachee in terms of the stated goals of the coaching.

Specifically, if I invited people to reflect on the coaching process, its impact and the learning that comes out of it, this was likely to be conducive to the outcomes of executive coaching. This is supported by Feldman and Lankau's (2005) review of executive coaching where their analysis suggests that self-awareness of learning and behavioural change were key outcomes for coaching participants. Similarly, in Cox et al's (2014) edited handbook, well known contributors from a range of disciplines within coaching, have all emphasised the importance of self-awareness for both participants for the success of the coaching process. Following Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008:425), I expected that my study might also enable debate about the coaching process and relationships themselves "through a cyclical and iterative process of education, reflection and action" which they argue they is appropriate when considering issues of causal relationships in action research.

Clearly, these are theories about what the impact of the research will be on those it is purporting to engage with. As Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008: 426) argue, however, this is an important part of their view of action research where "theory development may involve bringing an established theory into the field to be challenged or supported, building grounded theory when existing theory seems inadequate to the task". For me, this was a useful way of seeing my research design. On the one hand, as argued above, I needed to use some existing theory to identify and justify the research agenda and to pinpoint areas which need further investigation. On the other, my aim was not

to test existing theory but seek to challenge and develop it, such that an alternative view of coaching discourse might be developed. As I argued in the Literature Review chapter, given the paucity of theory around coachee agency and skills regarding the coaching process, I anticipated that it would be important to induct theoretical insights into coachee agency, together with the participants, in order to generate an understanding of what is happening and how this might positively affect, in the way that I suggest above, the goals of coaching.

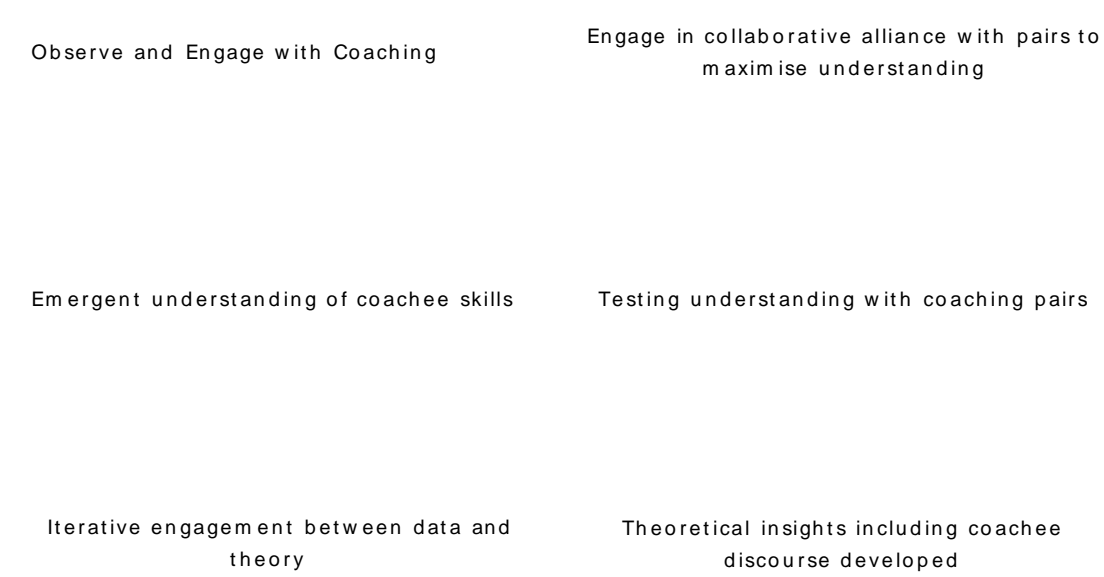
In developing my own research approach, I have developed an approach that is neither purely grounded theory nor action research but which has aspects of both within it and one which has at its centre a commitment to address issues regarding power and agency, which are at the core of critical management studies. Hence, my research approach was:

1. **Inductive** - I was seeking to develop a theory about coachee skills as opposed to testing an existing theory, albeit with the caveats expressed by Blaikie (2007) regarding pure induction or deduction
2. **Iterative**- I recognised that the analysis and theory building process would be developed on an ongoing basis, with a constant moving relationship between theory and data
3. **Grounded** - It was important that I began by looking at coaching relationships and conversations and seeking to understand how those worked in context before then using concepts from the literature to understand and interpret them
4. **Emancipatory** - A key commitment was that my research interventions would themselves open up new insights and seek to challenge a coach-centric prevailing discourse within the coaching world
5. **Qualitative** - The research process was designed to understand the 'how' and 'why' of coaching process from the point of the coachee's skills and agency
6. **Reflexive** - The research had personal implications for me within several roles - both personal and professional - thus needed to allow for my voice and input to be included within the process



Based on these core principles of research design, it was then possible to develop a research process which followed the logic highlighted in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Logic of research design



What Figure 3 illustrates is how I used the element of a grounded approach as well as aspects of action research to inform my research approach. The first stage was to recruit coaching pairs and engage with them in developing an understanding of the research process and the roles that we each would play in this. Following the collection of the data (this will be explained fully in the following sections of this chapter), I adopted an iterative approach to analysing the data and engaged with the coaching pairs in terms of checking and testing our understandings of what insights emerged regarding the concept of the skilled coachee. Once the field work was concluded, my plan was to use these insights to inform a formal engagement with theory, at which point the data and theory would be integrated so as to enable theoretical insights to be generated as a result.

Before examining the specific research methods that I used to realise this design, I will examine the first stage of the research design process in Figure 3 by explaining and justifying the decisions I made with regard to my data sample.

### Sampling

As Ritchie et al (2014) argue, decisions made on sampling are a critical part of a research design process. They examine a number of different sorts of sampling for qualitative research projects including probability, purposive, theoretical and convenience sampling. Examining my study, I explored the following questions:

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches, which influences coaching?

- a. How do they use conversational devices and strategies?
- b. What impact do these have on coaching process?
- c. What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

One possibility was to try and recruit a diverse range of coaching pairs, with coachees that have little experience or understanding of coaching, through to those who have significant experience of coaching as coachees.

Whilst this might have been representative of the range of coaching, my aim was not to try and reflect the coaching world by adopting a correspondence theory of truth (Darwin, 2010) but to work in a collaborative way with participants to develop a coherent alternative discourse regarding a coachee's role within coaching conversations. As such, it was important to recruit participants - both coaches and coachees - who had a understanding of coaching processes and who would be able to engage with reflecting on their own discourse in partnership with their coaches and with me as researcher. This was for two main reasons. To begin with, as Cox et al (2014) argue, coaching is a continuously developing field with increasing numbers of

approaches and practices, as well as courses and programmes in coaching. Hence, the general understanding and awareness about coaching and what it might help people achieve is more widespread (Western, 2012). It is therefore reasonable to assert that is becoming more and more likely that the coachees that coaches acquire as clients are more likely have experience or to have been exposed to coaching in some way. Also, I argued in Chapter 1, the contribution to coaching discourse has come not just from specialist training courses in coaching but from life coaches, television programmes, books and articles. This has meant that coaching is more widely disseminated than ever previously. I therefore decided to take a purposive sampling approach, where I focused on coaching pairs where the coachee could be seen to have strong understanding and experience of coaching. I speculated that this would be where the coachee themselves was either a practicing coach or at the least engaged in a learning and development process about coaching, either experientially or formally. Furthermore, I speculated that these coachees would, from that experience/training, have developed some skills or processes that would be both consciously adopted from their training, fitting with what they understood an 'effective' coachee to be, and unconsciously, from their experiential learning as a coach or as an experienced coachee. In addition, from a pragmatic point of view, my ability to recruit participants would be principally driven through coaching networks and personal contacts who were coaches. Given my desire to observe the coaching directly (see below for discussion of coaching observations), it was likely that coaches would recruit those of their coachees who would be most amenable to being observed in this way and who they felt would be most robust in terms of dealing with the research process.

However, although the basic principle was to adopt a purposive sample, I was still keen to adopt some of the principles of theoretical sampling in that my understanding of coachee skills, strategies and processes would be iterative. Hence, I anticipated that my interventions would be informed and updated after each interaction with a dyad until similar patterns were found with subsequent pairs (saturation). My intention, therefore, was to cease data collection at the point where saturation occurred. Furthermore, participant willingness and availability were also likely to be factors in terms of recruiting participants.

The characteristics of the participants in the study will be explored further in the first findings chapter.

Now that the research design process has been articulated, I will now move on to discuss how this design was achieved. This will include a justification of the data collection methods that were utilised as well as an account of the data analysis process.

## Research Methods

In accordance with the above process (see Figure 3), I developed the data collection methodology articulated below.

1. Observe a coaching session (approx 1hr in duration) and video it.
2. Directly after the session, interview the coaching pair as a pair, inviting them to reflect on the conversation they have just had
3. Review the interview notes and video
4. Interview coach and coachee separately at a later date (several weeks after), using the provisional observations from stages 1-3 to inform the questions and prompts.

I will now discuss each part of the data collection process, in turn, specifying the contribution of each aspect of the data collection process to the overall research process.

### *Observation of Coaching*

As I have stated several times in the thesis so far, one of the challenges in coaching is the impact of a coach-centric discourse on the behaviour of the coaching pairs in the study. Much that has been reported, as argued in the Literature Review Chapter, has positioned the coach as the process expert with the coachee as the passive recipient of the coaching process. My aim in seeking to observe coaching sessions was that all participants in the process - myself as researcher, the coach and the coachee, would have a common interaction (the coaching session) to reflect on and interpret. Whilst

each participant had a different interpretation of the interaction, the session provided a rich interaction as a source for analysis and discussion. As Richie et al (2014: 245) point out,

"researchers conducting qualitative observation acknowledge that the data they gather are a product of the intersubjective process between themselves as researchers and what they are observing".

Hence, my intention was not to capture a "true" picture of the coaching process but to provide a rich picture (Geertz, 1973) as possible of the interaction. This would then enable me, in keeping with a grounded approach, to engage in generating emergent insights about the role of the coachee in coaching conversations. Furthermore, in keeping with aspect of action research, the observed session would constitute an intervention in the relationship, the impact of which could be explored in the interview parts of the data collection process (see below).

I used video and audio recordings of the sessions because I recognised that, in keeping with the iterative approach I was taking to the research, I expected to come back to those recordings and see different things in them as my understanding of the coachee process developed. This has similarities to Charmaz and Bryant's (in Silverman, 2011: 301) account of grounded theory method.

Clearly, the notion that I would be present in the coaching session and recording the sessions would have an impact on the session and the way I would analyse it - I will examine these issues below when I discuss the outcomes of the data collection process. However, what I also anticipated that, given my knowledge and experience of teaching and researching coaching, I would notice different things to those of the participants in the coaching session. Observing and recording the process also gave me the possibility of accessing additional data such as body language, tone of voice and physical context, which an audio recording alone would not. As Baker (2006) pointed out, there are a number of challenges with observation such as what role to take as a researcher - non-participation, complete observer, observer as participant, peripheral membership, participant as observer, complete participant - which have different challenges within them. As my intention was to observe and then intervene, this made clarity of role more challenging as the expectation of intervention may influence the

quality of the coaching (although this did not seem to be the case - see below). Set against this possible contamination was the notion that the boundaries between the various aspects of the data collection process were clear and which role was being performed at a particular juncture. In addition, the aim was to obtain informed consent (Cooper and Schindler, 2003) from the participants that addressed some of the ethical issues about confidentiality that Baker (2006) raises. In their text on using video in social research, Heath et al (2010) raise a number of considerations, as well as informed consent, which include technical advice about camera positioning, but particularly in terms of understanding the context in which the behaviour takes place. This includes the social as well as material context. They sum up the advantages of using video as a data collection tool:

"Video captures a version of an event as it happens. It provides opportunities to record aspects of social activities in real time: talk, visible conduct and the use of tools, technologies, objects and artefacts. It also resists, as least in the first instance, reduction to categories or codes and thus preserves the original record for repeated scrutiny" (Heath et al, 2010: 5-6)

Accounting for Baker's (2006) concerns regarding the researcher's role in observation, I anticipated that I would need to mitigate some of the challenges presented by videoing the coaching sessions by organising the room in a specific way. Firstly, I would ensure that I was seated away from the coaching pair, so that I could see and hear them but so that I was not obviously within their coaching space. I planned to position the camera so it was next to me on a table so that I could easily set it to record in an unobtrusive way. Secondly, as I was using my observations to inform the paired interview, I would be taking notes. This, I anticipated, would have the dual virtue of ensuring that I would be able to capture key aspects of the dialogue, but, also, given that I would be looking at my notes, whilst writing, would lessen the perception of the participants that they were being closely visually observed. Whilst, as I will discuss later on, this would not completely mitigate the impact of my presence, I expected that it would move me closer to what Baker (2006) refers to as peripheral membership of the coaching space, at that stage, thus enabling a more naturalistic coaching session.

Of particular concern here was the importance of embedding ethical principles in the research design and data collection processes. Gray (2014:73) argues that these can be summarised as follows:

- Avoid harm to participants -as argued above, my aim was to conduct the research in a way that would re-inforce rather than undermine the coaching process, hence the room design as described on p78.
- Ensure informed consent of participants - in order to this, I planned to write to participants (see Appendix A for letter) in order to clarify the research agenda and to minimise any concerns. This would be re-stated at the data collection stages
- Respect the privacy of participants - whilst I would clearly be privvy to what would normally be a private conversation, I was committed to anonymising the participants and removing contextual data that would reveal their identities. This would be re-stated at the data collection stages.
- Avoiding deception - as I was being transparent in my research aims and seeking to adopt aspects of action research, I expected there to be no possibility of deception with the participants.

In the context of my research design, the advantage of being able to revisit the original record, including sound, physical context and social context, meant that I was able, as my understanding of coachee processes increased, to revisit the coaching sessions that were recorded and to see more in them. Hence, it gave me the opportunity to be more confident in the sense making (Weick, 1995) that I was engaging in, through the study. Although I did not anticipate, at the design stage, that I would be experiencing anyone using technologies, tools and artefacts, the advantages of using video seemed to outweigh the disadvantages of intrusion and perceptions of confidentiality.

#### *Paired Interview*

Given my commitments to emancipation, collaboration and connections with critical management studies, it was essential that I was able to, not only have access to the

coaching sessions, but be able to engage with the subjective interpretations of the coaching pair about what they had just experienced. What that enabled me to do was to give the coaching pair space to articulate their observations about what they had each noticed in the session but also to share my own observations and interpretations of the process. In this way, my emergent theoretical insights into coachee skills and behaviours could be sensechecked against the understanding of participants in terms of their credibility. The paired interview also gave me the opportunity to explore the collective sensemaking (Weick, 1995) that was occurring between the pair and then in collaborative partnership with me. Jansen (2015: 33), based on her use of research interviews with young offenders, goes further, arguing that research interviews give people the possibility of representing themselves differently:

"Seen from this perspective, the research interview and the therapeutic conversation can be considered to be certain forms of discursive practices involving both positioning and subjectivation offering those being interviewed opportunities for different ways of being."

Similarly, Silverman (2011: 145) argues strongly in the same vein regarding all qualitative interviews:

"Qualitative interviewing produces accounts that offer researchers a means of examining intertwined sets of findings: evidence of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, including the contexts and situations in which it emerges, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences"

As I have argued above, the subjective nature of coaching experience meant that it was likely that I, as researcher, the coach and the coachee would each have different experiences of the coaching conversation. Understanding where and how these accounts differ was likely to shed light on the impact that the prevailing discourse in coaching has on the different participants in the relationship. This view is supported by other studies using paired interviews, such as Allegretti et al (2010). In their analysis of shared experiences of doctors and patients when discussing chronic back pain, the researchers found that the use of paired interviews enabled them to identify "important themes and major areas of convergence and divergence/mismatch" (Allegretti et al, 2010: 676).



Following Roulston (2010), the approach I adopted was closest to a constructionist conception of the interview process, although, given my intention to challenge and question coaching discourse, there is also some elements of what she refers to as transformative interviewing. However, as I have argued above, my principal aim was not, in these interviews, to engender transformation in the participants - although I anticipated this might be a by-product of the intervention - but to generate data about coachee skills and behaviour that would contribute to an alternative discourse about coaching which took account of that discourse.

As I planned to conduct the interview directly after the coaching session, for reasons of participant (and researcher!) recall and practical issues about getting participants together, I expected that the structure and content of the interview would be, to some extent, driven by the coaching session itself. Having said that, a key question, which was consistent with the action research part of the research design, would be to ask participants what they noticed about the coaching session that they thought would be useful to me in terms of their understanding of my research aims and outcomes. This would have the benefit of seeking to perpetuate the democratic partnership between coach, coachee and researcher that I was seeking to establish but which would also enable new insights to be identified and discussed within the research setting. Hence, although my paired interview process would more readily fall under the category of what Gray (2014) refers to as non-directive interviews, I planned, as Gray (2014:386) suggests, to have the research objective questions clearly in mind so as to inform my prompts. Furthermore, as the interview would take place directly after the coaching session, the interview would also have characteristics of Gray's notion of focused interviews which "are based upon the respondent's subjective response to a known situation in which they have been involved" (Gray, 2014:386).

#### *I n d i v i d u a l T e l e p h o n e I n t e r v i e w*

The aim of including a one-to-one telephone interview was to seek to capture any further reflections and any observations that participants had had since the main coaching session and paired interview. Furthermore, it enabled each participant their individual voice following the coaching sessions and paired interviews. It afforded me, as researcher, chance to explore and expand on observations made in the

videos/audio recordings and, following the collaborative aspect of the research, to work with each participant to establish an understanding of how coachee skills had impacted on the session and on the relationship. Cooper and Schindler (2003) identify some disadvantages of phone interviews such as limitation on interview length, limitation on the use of visual questions, the ease with which interviews can be terminated and the lesser degree on participant involvement. However, these disadvantages were mitigated to a significant extent as the previous interactions with the participants (observed coaching and paired interview) would already have helped to build a collaborative relationship between them and me as researcher. That said, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) raise some questions about all qualitative research interviews that are worth taking account of in terms of my study here. Principally, the questions they raise concern power asymmetry within the qualitative interview. As they point out, "the research interview is not an open, everyday conversation between equal partners" as "the interviewer has scientific competence, and he or she initiates and defines the interview situation, determines the interview topic, poses questions and decides which answers to follow up on (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015: 37). They also argue that the research has a monopoly on what the participants 'really' meant and that, related to that, that the interviewer may seek to manipulate the conversation by attempting to elicit information without the interviewee understanding what the interviewer is after. In order to mitigate some of these challenges, I sought to be clear with all participants about what the purpose of the telephone interview was. Whilst I had to accept that Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) charge of power asymmetry in the interview data collection process, I tried to reduce this power asymmetry by inviting the participants to articulate their interpretations of the coaching session and paired interviews, as well as inviting them to say what they would focus on if they were researching the topic.

#### Data Analysis

My process of analysing the data was conducted in several stages. Firstly, as I worked through the research project, I made sets of notes about my own experience and progress which I captured in various forms i.e. word documents, Evernote lists and emails, which enabled me to recognise my own responses and how these might be useful to the research project. This, in some ways reflected the approach of Moustakas

(1990) with his work on heuristics. Moustakas (1990: 9) describes heuristic research as "a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further analysis/' Critically, in Moustakas's approach, the use of self is important. He summarises this in the following way:

"The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (Moustakas, 1990: 9)

As described in Chapter 1 and above, the parallel with my own experience and my role within the coaching community needed to be accounted for within the data analysis. Hence, it was my choice to explicitly include myself and my own interventions by referring to myself through the character, Paul, rather than in the first person (see Findings Chapters). This enabled me to differentiate between when my interventions might be closer to coaching supervision (Bachkirova et al, 2011) in terms of impact from those questions that were specifically about the research phenomena under investigation.

Once I had conducted each round of coaching session and paired interview, I generated a set of summary notes which I sent to participants prior to the individual telephone interviews. My intent in sending the notes was not to verify the truthfulness of these impressions but rather to see them as a device for generating further insights into the coachee process, as part of the individual interviews. As Prior (2011: 106) has argued, documents in social research should not be seen as "inert objects" but, rather, as objects of "dual relation to fields of action". Hence, the notes can be seen as, both a receptacle of my initial interpretations as a researcher but also as an "agent that is open to manipulation and/or use as an ally to be mobilised for future action" (Prior, 2011: 106). Hence, these notes were used by me and by the participants as a device for stimulating the telephone interviews and enabling these interpretations and summaries to be open to inspection and challenge or to affirmation. Once all data had been collected, the three strands of primary data - coaching sessions (7), paired interviews (7) and individual interviews (13) were then professionally transcribed to enable analysis of the data. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a telephone

interview with Coachee 2, despite several attempts to contact her, which means I had 13 rather than 14 interviews. Once this data was received from the transcribers, I then placed the data in an Excel spreadsheet. This then enabled me, first, to group the telephone interview data together into several initial data management categories:

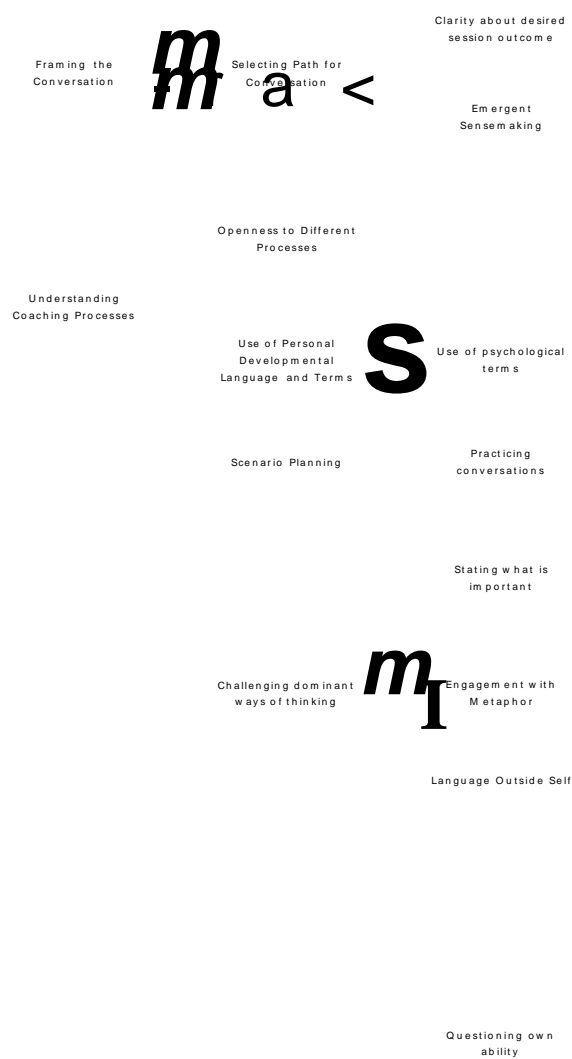
1. Biographical detail
2. The coach's own process
3. Comments on the research process
4. Coach's comments on the coachee process
5. Coach's comments on relationship with coachee
6. Coachees' comments on the relationship
7. Coachees' comments on the coach's process
8. Impact of session on the coachee
9. Comparison with other relationships

These were not intended, at this stage, to be analytical categories but, instead, were a way of noticing patterns in what coaches and coachees talked about. Nevertheless, they were generated from seeking to code each line of the data in terms of where it belonged which meant that, at this stage, I also began to notice some possible analytical themes which seemed different from these data management categories. I noted these at this stage but did nothing further with them before moving to the next stage. Instead, I then coded the data from the coaching sessions themselves by using the study objective questions as the focus for the analysis. This therefore enabled me to focus on patterns of behaviour and conversational strategies in all three strands of data and to begin the process of theory building with regard to the concept of the skilled coachee, based on these patterns of behaviour. By doing so, I was then able to draw up a data structure (see Figure 4) which articulated the sense making processes from specific conversational behaviours observed in coaching sessions and interviews through to their connection with concepts concerning coachee agency in the coaching literature. Because my research design contained elements of action research - in particular, a democratic partnership with the research participants - I was able to be confident that the themes I was generating from the data were credible to the participants because they had been involved in their creation.

Following Gray (2014), I recognised the importance of being rigorous in relation to qualitative data analysis. Gray (2014) argues that trustworthiness in qualitative research can be achieved by demonstrating transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility. These were achieved in the following way:

- Transferability - as I have argued above, the themes generated from each pair were compared and contrasted with other pairs so that, allowing for different contexts, I was able to make judgements about the similarities between them, as well as where they were different
- Dependability - using the data management strategies, described on p83, I am able to demonstrate the audit trails in relation to how the themes were arrived at
- Confirmability - in my data analysis chapters, as well as in Chapter 1, I render the connections between my interpretations, and the data, explicit
- Credibility - in my design, as argued on p83, I built in member checks, where I checked interpretations with the participants at the interview stages

Figure 4: Data Structure



I then used these emergent themes and examples to re-interrogate the data in the light of these. This resulted in either additional support being generated for the themes already generated or new themes/refinement of existing themes being developed. In this sense, the process more closely resembled King's (1998) template analysis approach, where thematic codes are defined, put into a hierarchy but then revised, deleted or new ones inserted as the analysis progresses. For example, one of the codes originally generated was that of using 'You' Instead of T as part of the language strategies of the coachee. However, upon reflection, this category was widened to be called Language Outside of Self, which better captured the category. The thematic codes were refined iteratively until all sections of text that were relevant

to the study objective questions were coded, and each code was clear and distinct in terms of its explanation.

Once the data categories were determined, the codes were then examined in terms of the concepts that could be used to answer the study objective questions. For example, coachees engaging with metaphor and using psychologically informed terms to make sense of their own actions were seen as sub-categories of a higher order process of using developmental language. This use of developmental language, was then, in turn, seen as part of a higher level skill of understanding coaching processes, which in turn, seemed to be an enabling process for coachees. With this conceptual map in place, it was then possible to re-interrogate the data to identify extracts of text which supported the claims being made in relation to the study objective questions in an iterative cycle. This process followed a similar path to that taken by Coule and Patmore (2013) in their study of non-profit organisations. In that study, the authors were seeking to argue that "the practice of normative, discursive work are central tenets of both the maintenance and transformation of institutions" (Coule and Patmore, 2013:980). They were able to build theoretical insights in this area by moving from specific first order coding, which they then grouped in second order themes. These themes were then refined and aggregated into higher themes which were then used to provide answers to their study objective questions and enabled them to make a contribution to knowledge regarding not for profit organisations.

In the context of my study, I began to notice, as I interrogated the data, that similar patterns were emerging from the data (see Figure 4) with fewer, newer themes being identified. As I reached the seventh pair, the insights gained from the previous pairs were being confirmed. Whilst my understanding of these themes was deepened by engaging with the seventh pair, no new themes were emerging from either my observations of the coaching process, or from the paired and individual interviews. Hence, it was appropriate to stop data collection at this stage.

The data was collected over a twelve month period, involving a number of stages in setting up and organising this. This involved some false starts in terms of recruiting pairs. In some cases, coaches had identified a coachee who fitted the criteria and who was willing to engage in the process but then they would pull out, either due to a change in personal circumstances i.e. moving away or change of heart. In one case, the coachee was the principal contact and had sought to recruit the coach to be part of the process but the coach declined to be involved. In another instance, the coach had identified a client who was willing to engage with the process but then the coachee was diagnosed with a serious illness and was unable to continue.

A significant obstacle to overcome was my desire to video and be present at the coaching session. Interestingly (this will be explored in the Conclusions Chapter), a number of coaches who were approached were reluctant to be involved because they felt that they were "not ready" to have someone observe their coaching sessions. This was despite the fact that I had been clear with them that my focus of attention was mainly on what the coachees did in the coaching session. It seemed that 'performance anxiety' was, for some, more of an issue than I had anticipated. However, with the study participants, all pairs in their paired interview session remarked on how, after a few minutes, they had forgotten that I and the camera were there and believed that the coaching session was naturalistic. Set against that was the observation that, at the end of the coaching sessions, a couple of the pairs expressed relief or made jokes such as "that's a wrap" to end the session (although they were still being filmed as part of the paired interview). On balance, I believe that the coaching sessions were sufficiently rich to enable some useful insights to be drawn from them. Furthermore, it is important to note that any self protection or lack of real engagement, particularly on the part of the coachee, might also be considered to be skilful activity on the part of the coachee, which would have an impact on the relationship and the conversation - part of the very phenomena I was interested in exploring.

Another challenge was that, in some cases, the telephone interviews were arranged some weeks after the coaching session and paired interview. Although the participants had the benefit of their own notes and my summary notes, it was sometimes a



challenge for them to remember their precise motivations and to recall exactly what had been said, even with the help of the notes. That said, the intervening time period had enabled some to reflect further on the impact of the session and enabled them to generate significant insights; for example, one of the coaches (Coach 5) had found the coaching session useful in helping him work with coachees in his new employer organisation and he was able to share some of these insights in the telephone interview.

In terms of the data analysis, a significant challenge was how to make sense of the volume of data that had been collected. As I have stated above, a useful strategy, in keeping with theoretical sampling and a grounded approach to data collection, was in seeking to make sense of the themes that were emerging from the various data sources as the study progressed. This process was helped by developing notes but also being able to check out hunches and assumptions with the participants during the paired interview sessions, in keeping with the democratic research partnerships I had attempted to develop with the participants. Furthermore, by using the initial coding approach outlined above, I was able to group the responses into generic data collection categories which made the thematic analysis of these easier to manage. I was then able to generate a thematic map which will be expanded upon in the next two chapters.

#### Chapter Summary

Following the articulation of my truth and knowledge commitments, the research design for the study was articulated and justified. The data analysis process that was adopted was that of a grounded approach but without recourse to classical grounded theory as discussed above. In addition, I adopted an approach that utilised elements of action research but within a critical theory frame. I argued that this blend of approaches was needed in this area. It was important to recognise a number of key elements that required this approach:

- The importance of challenging the prevailing discourse on coaching which seems to be coach-centric
- The need to recognise and deal with issues of personal reflexivity in the research process

- The utility of adopting and adapting several research traditions to develop a research approach that would best address the study objectives i.e. action research, grounded theory and critical theory

Hence, the research design that was undertaken was inductive, iterative, grounded, emancipator, qualitative and reflexive. These elements were then used to drive the selection of appropriate data analysis methodologies i.e. King (1998), Moustakas (1990), Coule and Patmore (2013) which fitted with the above blend of research approaches. The research methods chosen were those of observation and interview. These were justified in terms of the relative advantages and disadvantages of these methods. Finally, the process of data analysis was discussed, summarising how this process was enacted, including some of the challenges involved in collecting that data. These findings will be represented thematically and the thematic map of the codes generated will be shown in order to facilitate understanding.

## **Findings: Enabling Mechanisms Chapter**

### Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce and explain the first set of findings from the fieldwork conducted. Before examining the field work, I introduce the fieldwork and explain the mode of writing and how the data will be explained and analysed. Finally, I draw some interim conclusions from this first part and introduce the second chapter of findings on Defensive Mechanisms.

### Findings Overview

As I have stated in the previous three chapters, the focus of the research was to answer the following study objective questions:

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches, which influences coaching?

a. How do they use conversational devices and strategies?

b. What impact do these have on coaching process?

c. What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

As I have suggested in the Literature Review Chapter, one of the principal commitments in the research was to seek to examine the extent to which coachees exercised influence and power within coaching relationships. I have used the term 'agency' in the Literature Review to express the extent to which coachees actively influence coaching processes. By looking at seven coaching relationships, I was able to identify some common patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking which I used to answer the questions above.

### Summary Of Relationships

The participants who agreed to work with me in this study (14 people) were all aged between 40 -65 at the time of the study. There were 11 women and 3 men involved. As will be shown below, all had some familiarity with coaching and were in existing relationships at the time of the study.

*Pair 1*

In this pairing, both parties were involved in coaching. Coach 1 is a highly experienced coach who works a lot with Transactional Analysis (TA) as a concept. Both coach and coachee are Scottish women and their paths often cross in the various forums that they move in within local government circles in Scotland. Coachee 1 is also a coach in training and therefore has some understanding of the coaching process. This was an ongoing, mature coaching relationship, where both parties seemed to have an understanding of what was being offered and received. The coaching session and paired interview took place in Scotland at Coachee 1's place of work, in a meeting room.

*Pair 2*

Coach 2 was an experienced older female coach with a background in therapy and who worked as a freelance coach. Coachee 2 was a younger female housewife who was trained as an art therapist who had also done some coaching training. She had worked with Coach 2 regularly for a number of sessions (monthly to six weekly) and this was now coming to an end. A complication to the relationship, in some ways, was the fact that Coach 2 was also working with Coachee 2's husband on some issues that he had about career and moving forward.

*Pair 3*

Both Coach 3 and Coachee 3 are female independent coaches who have a one way (Coach 3 coaching Coachee 3) coaching relationship. Coach 3's background is in careers coaching whereas Coachee 3 is from a learning and development background in HR. They met through a professional body meeting that they both attend, in the Lincoln area, although Coach 3 is originally from Scotland.

*Pair 4*

Coach 4 is independent coach and OD practitioner whereas Coachee 4 is a former manager in a local authority who has recently moved into independent practice as a

coach, following her coach training in Sheffield. It was as part of her coaching training that Coachee 4 met Coach 4. They began with a one way coaching relationship but were, at the time of the coaching session, about to move into a co-coaching relationship. Both are English females.

#### *Pair 5*

Both Coach 5 and Coachee 5 are male managers working in private sector large organisations and are working part time as coaches within their respective organisations. Coachee 5 works in HR whereas Coach 5 is a senior manager. They met as part of their coach training in Sheffield and developed a co-coaching relationship.

#### *Pair 6*

Coach 6 is an English male senior manager, working in the Scottish health service who coaches part time within his organisation whilst Coachee 6 is an English female freelance coach and action learning set facilitator. They met as part of their coach training in Sheffield and developed a co-coaching relationship.

#### *Pair 7*

Coach 7 is a highly experienced older female freelance female coach and supervisor whilst Coachee 7 is an experienced head of a small charity who has been involved with developing coaching programmes for her staff and for herself for 3 years.

As described in the Research Methodology Chapter, the themes discussed in this chapter were arrived at through a rigorous process of initial coding followed by an ongoing iterative process of refining and redefining codes until they seemed to capture my understanding of what the findings meant for an alternative discourse on coaching. I will present these below. In doing so, I will, as explained in the Introduction Chapter and in the Research Methodology Chapter, be referring to myself as Paul when I am in the paired interview/individual role. This enables me, as researcher, to use my own comments and observations as data to explore the themes that emerge. I will illustrate each theme by using a number of examples from the data analysis process - from coaching sessions, paired interviews and individual interviews - to shed light on the

theme being advanced. After each of the themes, I conclude each section with a reflection on each theme within which I integrate in my own personal experience and explore the implications for own development, as described in Chapter 1.

#### *Data Analysis*

In essence, I found that coachee agency is expressed in two main ways - enabling processes and defensive processes. In this chapter, the enabling processes will be explored, followed by the defensive processes in the subsequent chapter. Enabling processes are defined here as behaviours and processes, that the coachee engages in, that are functional for the coaching process in that they facilitate progress towards the ultimate outcome or purpose of the coaching. Defensive processes are also functional for the coachee in that they help protect the coachee from being too vulnerable within the coaching relationship and process, thus making it possible for them to remain in it. These latter processes, however, do not necessarily move the coaching process towards its ultimate outcome or purpose and, in some cases can militate against this - these will be dealt with in the next chapter. This chapter, therefore, will focus on enabling processes.

#### Enabling Processes

Coachees often demonstrated their skills at being coached by engaging in certain behaviours that were functional in terms of increasing the focus and depth of the coaching process. These processes seem, therefore to enable the coaching process to move forward. They are categorised here as Framing the Conversation, Understanding the Coaching Process and Reframing Thinking (see Figure 4). These first order codes describe a bundle of skills that the coachees employed - either consciously or sub-consciously - to enable the coaching process. The second order codes - Selecting Path for Conversation, Openness to Different Processes, Use of Personal Developmental Language and Terms Scenario Planning, Recognition of own values and emotions, Challenging dominant ways of thinking - describe the ways in which these skills are applied. Finally, the third order codes - Clarity about desired session outcome, Engaging with creative methods, engagement with metaphor, use of psychological terms, practicing conversations - describe the individual conversational devices and strategies that are enacted by coachees as a result of using these bundles of skills.

These processes will now be explored, using a series of examples, taken from the transcripts of coaching sessions and interviews. In each of these examples, certain words or phrases will be emboldened. This is intended to highlight where the coachee has used phrases which demonstrate the conversational devices and strategies being discussed.

#### Framing the Conversation - Selecting Path for Conversation

Framing the Conversation refers to the conversational skills that the coachee uses to move the coaching conversation to the areas that they would like to focus on. All of the coachees in the study seemed able to articulate the outcomes they wanted from the coaching but in different ways. For some, this was done by clearly spelling out what outcomes they wanted whilst for others it was about presenting the coach with a summary of an issue(s) or problem that they wanted to work on. This helped the coaching process by giving the coach some scope and context via which they could make interventions by asking questions and probing what these outcomes might look like. By stating clearly what they did/ did not want in their coaching conversations, this then sets the coaching conversation on a particular path. Hence, the coachee frames the conversation for the coach so that the coach can intervene.

#### *Example 1*

In this example, the session had just begun and the coach had asked an open question about what the coachee wanted from the session. The coachee responds:

Coach 1: So what would be a good outcome from this conversation?

Coachee 1: "I think a **good outcome for me** would be to just explore I suppose the thoughts I have about why I'm maybe not taking, I'm going to say the words "a tougher line" but I don't even think it is about a tougher line. It's just **about me being more clear** about what I need from this person and then going away, **being able to have another discussion** with her".

It is noticeable that the coachee, by offering the phrase "tougher line" and then giving further information about a good outcome, is helping the coach to know where to focus her questions and interventions and what her desired outcomes will be. In the paired interview, Coachee 1 acknowledges this ability to frame the issues:

"Yeah, and actually, it's sort of just highlight, 'cause **I had two topics that I wanted to discuss today** and one was personal, which is about, you know, my future career or whatever, and what was quite interesting for me was that, whenever we were speaking about this, it was **almost clarifying in my head** what's making me think about the issue I didn't talk about and how closely linked..."

There seem to be two related but separate cognitive skills at work here; firstly, there is forethought and clarity about what to bring to the session but also an ability to synthesise and link together these issues. Similarly, in the individual interview, she referred explicitly to this framing and reframing:

"So, for me, it's not necessarily about setting a specific goal it's just about **allowing your mind to be free** and I think to say out loud things that you've been bottling up, because I think sometimes when you say things out loud, you know they're not as bad as you thought, or you have **to reframe them** because they don't really make any sense"

By synthesising different outcomes and selectively articulating them in the coaching session, the coachee invites the coach to go with them down a certain conversational path which enables them to work on the issues that are most pertinent to them at the time. In this sense, the coachee is framing the conversation in terms of its scope and deciding what aspects of the issue are available for discussion. Whilst this, again, gives the coach scope to work with, it also narrows the scope of the conversation to a series of key issues for the coach to home in on. In the paired interview, Coach 1 characterised this process as being collaborative in nature:

Coach 1: I think there's something about the issue that was presented and then what was emerging and in the coaching process, the capacity and willingness



for both parties to go with what was emerging whilst not losing sight of what the presenting issue is.

The coachee, however, saw the process as more individual and, despite the fact that she had come to the session with some topics in mind, as more emergent in nature.

Coachee 1 : I think it is just, you know, that issue about what emerges, because what you start off talking about is often just sort of symptomatic of what is going on underneath the stuff that you ignore, the stuff that you just park to the side and I think having the opportunity to actually let it out is quite... I think it has a huge impact on how you then move forward because you acknowledged it.

Hence, both the presenting issues and underlying issues, vocalised by the coachee, tend to set the path for the conversation, albeit in collaboration with the coach. Therefore, whilst the coach's opening question and following interventions are critical, the coachee's ability to frame the conversation around their key issues and be able to respond to the coach's prompt is also necessary.

#### *Example 2*

In the extract below, the coachee also displays clarity about outcome focus but this is manifested in the way the coachee decides not to pursue something from their previous conversation as they felt that following up on this conversation would not yield much further benefit to them:

Coach 3: Do we need to review what we talked about last time?

Coachee 3 : I don't think so, 'cause I think that was a separate exercise, separate session, and **as far as I'm concerned that door's closed on that now.**

It is noticeable here that the coachee is very clear about what she does not want to pursue but then goes on to articulate what she does want to focus on:

Coachee 3: Okay. **I'd like to get** or to leave the session really with some **more insight** as to... and this is going to sound quite... 'cause it is a negative really, is

about I resist offering training workshops, whatever you want to call them, to my clients

Coach 3: Okay. So you've done some thinking and kind of some self-analysis around the reasons why. So we're looking at by the end of our discussion to be at a stage where you've got a bit... tell me about insight in terms of... tell me a little bit about insight in terms of what that kind of might look and feel like for you?

Again, having clarity about the desired outcome and being able to articulate this means that the coachee is able to select the path for the conversation and frame the issue in a way that makes it possible for the coach to work with them on it. Coach 3, in this example, is then able to use her skills to work with Coachee 3 in generating a specific session outcome. However, this is only possible on the basis that Coachee 3 is able to articulate and work with her issue as well as being clear about what is important to her. In her individual interview, Coachee 3 also said, however, that one of the reasons that she wanted to work with Coach 3, in the first place, was that she would challenge her:

Coachee 3: I feel that there was a connection, for want of a better term, with Coach 3. I liked her style, I liked her no-nonsense approach. I couldn't be doing with anyone that's too airy-fairy with me, and letting me get away with things, and that suited me well.

Although the coachee had selected the path for the conversation in terms of her resistance, it was the coach who then sought to realise the agenda of moving towards an outcome. This was in keeping with Coachee 3's assessment of Coach 3, above. In the paired interview, Coach 3 described it thus in response to Paul's questioning:

Paul: So what was it in terms of the conversation or the relationship that enabled you to say 'now right this is the time that I'm going to push her a bit'?

Coach 3: I just kind of felt that we were beginning... we were in danger of becoming cyclical and not moving forward and I kind of felt that we needed to look forwarding. We've done a lot of reflecting, we've done a lot of how you felt, we've done a lot of that kind of stuff and it just kind of felt that it was the

right time to move forward, I think, and to start thinking about okay, if I've just got to do it, what do I need to do to help me to move forward and to begin to action it? 'Cause you talked a lot about I just needed to do it.

Hence, the coachee had successfully framed the conversation in terms of its focus which then enabled the coach to fulfil her role of challenging the coachee and not letting her get away with lack of progress in dealing with the issue. Although this turn in the conversation is evidence of skilled coach activity, there is also evidence of the coachee's successful contracting with the coach in terms of their challenge.

### *Example 3*

In this example, Coachee 7 is talking about her role as a Chief Executive of a small social enterprise and is clarifying what she would like the conversation to focus on as well as what she wants from Coach 7:

"I think the thing that's at the front of my head at the moment is my team. And **how can I best go about getting them to perform** and maybe getting them to perform as a team. I've organised a team-building, coaching thing for them in the northeast, a day for us all together to talk about what we're going to do as an organisation. And then they're going to get individual coaching from that. I want to be able to make the most of that for them. All I've done is organise it yet. It's not happening 'til next month. I wanted to talk about that with you and **your insight into that.** But I think I kind of wanted to start from scratch and get some sort of like **tools for working better with them,** 'cause it's not working very well at the moment."

Coach 7: What makes it not work so well?

By framing the conversation in this way, Coachee 7 has selected a path for the conversation that Coach 7 can make sense of, as it provides some context to the proposed intervention planned by Coachee 7 and some clarity about what would be a good outcome from the session for her. However, as in previous examples, Coachee 7 perceives this as a more emergent process than she is used to engaging with in her

work life. In her paired interview, she compares her normal work planning process with her experience:

Coachee 7: it's one of the few times when I'm not planning things 'cause I'm an inveterate planner. And normally...

Paul: That's in contrast to that.

Coachee 7: Yeah. You know, normally I'm sort of right I'll do this, this, this, this and this or I've done this, that and the other, and I don't do that that all with these sessions.

Nevertheless, despite her lack of formal preparation, Coachee 7 does manage to select the path for the conversation and enable Coach 7 to support her in focusing on her issues.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

Given the prevalence of goal focused coaching, I am not surprised to see this aspect of coachee behaviour being so prevalent in all of the coaching sessions in the study. My view is, however, that this ability to offer and frame an issue in a way that is accessible for a coach is quite critical to the coaching relationship and the success of the conversation. As can be seen from the brief examples above, the coachee's articulation of what they want (or do not want) provides a path for the coach to follow and some choices about what to focus on. However, this focus seems to be at an unconscious level for participants in the study, with some feeling that it is more emergent than pre-determined. The coachee's emergent sensemaking does seem to contribute to the coaching process by offering areas to explore and probe to the coach. Whilst it could be argued that coachee is merely responding to the coach's skilful questions, the coachees in the study are using the coach's prompts to become clearer about what they want, as well as offering more depth and context about the issue they are focussed on. When I noticed the theme, I considered referring to this coachee behaviour as goal setting or being clear about the outcome. However, as I have suggested above, the coachee is not simply stating a goal but setting out a possible path/route for the conversation.

In my own experience, during this PhD study process, I have experienced therapy sessions where the helper has expressed frustrations with me because I am "not giving them anything to work with" and that I seemed "tired and unresponsive". In retrospect, I feel these attributions may have been accurate. This illustrates for me the importance and impact that the coachees' skills of offering appropriate contextual information and volunteering what they want are in making for a successful coaching outcome. It also suggests that, however insightful the coach is, co-operation in the form of input about what the coachee wants and other contextual information makes the process a lot easier for the coach, in particular. This is because it enables the coach to begin to identify challenges, tensions and other possibilities in the coachee's account that might be usefully drawn to the coachee's attention. This raises another possible interpretation of these behaviours. Given that the coachee may be wary of exposing themselves to the coach in terms of disclosing difficult emotions or challenges, the coachee may select a path for their conversation that they feel is relatively uncontentious in order to distract the coach or to steer them onto safer conversational ground. This could mean that Framing might, alternatively be considered as a defensive mechanism (these are considered further in the next chapter). Whilst it is not possible to completely rule this out, my original interpretation of Framing is supported by many of the coachees identifying, in different ways, difficult or challenging areas to be coached on and, in some cases, becoming emotional in the sessions themselves.

#### Understanding the Coaching Process- Use of Personal Development Language and Terms

In all of the coachees in the study, each had some familiarity with developmental work, hence developmental language; in most cases, the coachees were actually coaches in training themselves. As a result, this enabled the coachees to articulate their challenges and issues in ways that their coaches could recognise and engage with. This manifested itself in two main ways - being open different processes and techniques within coaching and being able to engage with developmental language.

*Example 1*

In this example, the coachee has been talking about her issue with a member of her staff at work and how to manage them. Coachee 1 is aware of the skills and techniques within coaching and how she might use these in her management approach.

Coachee 1: She needs to hear what I think of her and I do actually... I do regularly, having read the Nancy Kline book, and having learned **from my coach training about giving feedback** in a positive way and I try very hard with the team to always acknowledge what they've done and thank them, particularly with Claire"

As the conversation develops, it emerges that Coachee 1 is reluctant to challenge Claire because she is conscious that her team have had a particularly difficult year and that she is aware that this member of staff has issues at home, also. At this point, Coach 1 elects to challenge Coachee 1 about whether this is in fact more about Coachee 1 herself:

Coach 1: Because of the work that we've done together in the last year, I know you've had a tough year and I'm wondering if you're **discounting** how tough this year has been for you and actually what the empathy or support that you want to give her is what's been missing for you and I'm wondering how that lies for you, 'cause it's my hunch and not yours.

Coachee 1: Well certainly, you know, the review process was really tough and I think there wasn't a lot of support given. We were cast out to get on with it and if it all went pear-shaped then I think my head would have been on the block, so yeah, I do relate to that. I do relate to that. And I think that is right. I feel there's a **parallel** thing going on.

It is noticeable here that Coachee 1 labels her own behaviour by using a term from Transactional Analysis (and Freudian Psychology) - that of a parallel process. Coach 1 is clearly aware that Coachee 1 has an understanding and awareness of coaching, due to their mature and long standing relationship. Therefore, she is able to offer this

challenge to Coachee 1's behaviour, safe in the knowledge that Coachee 1 has the skills and knowledge to understand and interpret this.

In her telephone interview, Coach 1 attributes this overt acknowledgement of Coachee 1's coaching training, and use of psychological terms such as parallel, in the coaching session itself, as being a way of getting acknowledgement from Paul and from Coach 1 of her insight and understanding of these issues:

Coach 1: I think she wanted to be stroked for being a trained coach, so noticing that she was in tune with things like parallel coaching. The lack of stroking that she gets in the organisation - you know the lack of "y°u/re doing a really great job" and her inability to tell herself that she's doing a really great job

In Coachee 1's phone interview, she does, again make reference to her status as a trained coach - albeit an inexperienced one - when Paul explores her reflections on the coaching session with Coach 1:

Coachee 1: I was actually thinking about it in terms of **my own coaching practice** because I had a client recently and that was what was going on there, so it really helped me pick up on that, because it might have been ... in the past I might not have noticed anything, you know because my coaching career is fairly new and I'm developing my practice, and because I'm now out in a learning situation where you go back every month and your getting to see other people and see other things happening, I do feel that that has a huge impact on my own practice because sometimes I'm coaching and I'm thinking 'oh God, I hope I'm doing it right.' You know there's nobody about to bounce things off or to observe, and so I feel that, whenever I had my last coaching client that was **the language that was going on** and I was able to pick that up, and I might not have picked it up had I not been aware that I'd done it myself

In this comment, she does recognise that she has been able to learn from the research intervention itself and then apply this awareness to her own coaching practice. In the

paired interview, however, Coachee 1 argues that it is the awareness of the coaching process which enables her to engage with it:

Paul : To what extent do you think that training or that experience of being coached enhances the coaching relationship and the conversation?

Coachee 1: I think, certainly for me, being, you know, going through coach training really enhanced that process for me, but I think probably what gives me more benefit is actually whenever you've been through a few coaching sessions and you start to get into... it's almost like a rhythm, so things start to emerge for you because you are aware that if you're going to be challenged, you do get poked in a place maybe that you haven't been allowing yourself to think about. So you're **open to what comes out.**

Hence, a key feature of this understanding of the process is that it enables the coachee to deliberately keep themselves open to challenge, even when the experience can be difficult to deal with. In the paired interview, Coach 1 reflects on the impact of Coachee 1's openness, following a question from Paul on this:

Paul: And would you say that... I mean, you talked about your own process. Would you say that degree of openness that we're seeing in Coachee 1 is typical or usual for you?

Coach 1: It's probably more finely tuned I think and I... you know, if that had been a first or second coaching session with somebody... I think... I was going to say I don't know if I would have been as challenging. I think I probably would have been. I think I **would have had to work harder** as the coach than I had to work with Coachee 1 because she is so, in my experience, **she is very in touch with her own process.**

Here, the use of psychological terms by Coachee 1 signals, to Coach 1, that Coachee 1 has a good level of self-awareness and is aware of her own processes in coaching conversations. This seems to have given Coach 1 permission to be more challenging than she might have been with clients who had less experience and understanding of the coaching process.



At a less conscious level, all of the coachees demonstrated some familiarity, in their use of language with terms drawn from professions associated with personal development e.g. psychology, therapy. For instance, Coachee 2, who is a trained art therapist, discusses her relationship with her husband using terms that seemed to have link to psychological processes such as repression:

Coachee 2: "Yeah, but I'm nervous about it [having a conversation about relationship with husband]. Because, you know, the way I sort of talk to Alistair or about him or stuff to do with our relationship, it very depends on how I feel that day. You know, sometimes I am just feeling very... you know, it can **all come up to the surface** and I can really express myself. And other times it, you know, just gets **pushed right back down there**. But yeah, anyway, that... you know, it's a good thing I think".

Whilst, in some ways, these can appear to be everyday expressions that many people use to describe their feelings, these statements seem to suggest a sophisticated understanding of psychological processes such as repression.

In a similar vein, Coachee 4 is able to draw on similar concepts to help explore her feelings and challenges in relation to her job:

**I'm in flight mode** at the moment. I know I am, I can feel that I just want to go, oh, that's not me anymore, and go into something new, and I was thinking about it the other day. You know, I've got a big milestone birthday coming up and I've been working on and off since I was 21, so that's nearly 30 years of solid, responsible, looking after kind of work, and that's a long time without a break. And part of me thinks, actually, maybe this isn't **existential angst** about who am I, maybe this is just I'm tired of working in the public sector."

Again, in this example, the coachee demonstrates that she has a sophisticated understanding of her own motivations and feelings and is able to use terms drawn from psychology and therapy to label these feelings. Paul explored this with her in the paired interview section when working through his observations from the coaching session:

Paul: And the other thing around your words and your language that I was noticing is, there was a strong familiarity with psychological concepts. You know, there was a lot of stuff around projection and affirmation and those sorts of things, which again seemed to provide a different level of understanding which seemed to enrich the conversation.

Coachee 4: Well, I did a psychology first degree and then I just completed the module, but also I've had psychoanalysis for about a year, twice a week for a year and then, you know, you read up about it and the theories. I guess that all starts to... I've never had a context to use that stuff in before and suddenly here it is and it's appropriate and okay.

Hence, for Coachee 4, this coaching space seems to have afforded her the opportunity to engage with her deeper understanding of developmental/ psychological concepts and to apply them in the service of the conversation and of the relationship.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

As argued above, a familiarity with language and concepts drawn from psychology and therapy can be helpful to coaching in that it provides a shared language for the coaching pair which can speed things up and make things more effective. This point is supported by Coach 3 when she compares coaching other clients (not familiar with coaching) with her work with Coachee 3.

"So the language that I use is probably... so I would probably change... yeah, I would change, I do change my language, you know, and I would also question them. So, you know, like, Coachee 3 brought up, didn't she, about Gestalt and all that kind of stuff, then I would question them more about what did they understand by that, rather than taking it that they understood it, and I do use drawings more, 'cause I do quite a lot of kind of graphics and stuff, and we use drawings as a way for them to express themselves."

My sense is that that shared language and understanding was a key part of sustaining the relationship between coach and coachee and was an enabling mechanism for the efficacy of the coaching process. As I suggest above, it is possible to argue that this

shared language is not particular to coachees, or coaches, but that this is simply an artefact of a greater awareness of this language through popular culture e.g. television, books, films, etc. However, all of the coaches (including Coach 3, above) had been instrumental in recruiting their coachees for this research project, from amongst other clients that they had been working with. All coaches, in their individual telephone interviews had indicated that their coachee understood the coaching process and their role within that, in comparison to others they have worked with in a coaching capacity. Hence all coaches felt that they could rely on their coachee to engage with these terms without much difficulty. Furthermore, this reliance on language and understanding of the coaching process is also paralleled in Paul's relationship with all the participants, within the coaching interviews. The participants, due to their familiarity with personal development language, could be relied upon to engage with Paul as co-researchers when considering his observations of the coaching process.

This reliance also resonates with me and my personal experience of therapy and other helping relationships where the helper can depend on that understanding in order to invest time in other areas of the helping conversation. This is not simply a matter of knowing the vocabulary of personal development language, however. Rather, it is a matter of a deeper understanding regarding the principles and purposes of developmental conversations, such as coaching conversations. It seems to me that, in my various developmental relationships as a helpee - client, coachee, supervisee - my helpers can rely on my understanding of helping relationships. They seem to me to be confident in my ability to respond well to challenge, to articulate what I want from the coaching relationship and to give feedback about how helpful it is. This seems to enhance the relationships in terms of their strength and depth. Hence, having the shared language may be a signifier of this deeper understanding.

#### Understanding Coaching Processes- Openness to Different Processes

In coaching sessions 4 and 7, in particular, the coaches in both sessions invited the coachees to engage with creative coaching methods in order to explore the conversations and the relationships. Coachee 4 had requested to use musical instruments as had been in a workshop with Coach 4 where they had been used and

was curious about their impact and effect on the coaching session and conversation. In the paired interview that followed the coaching session, Coachee 4 acknowledged the reason that she had chosen to engage with musical instruments in a coaching session in this way:

Coachee 4: I'm not dissembling, I'm not making things up, but I could talk myself out of or into anything really and what I like about some of this, and the roundabouts one was very good for that, it cuts through because you're almost, you know, on a deeper level

Hence, for Coachee 4, she is aware that using creative methods such as engaging with musical instruments is likely to be challenging in some senses to her.

In her individual interview, Coach 4 suggests that it is, in her opinion, more skilled coachees who are able to engage with such methods:

Coach 4: Because it's more skilled coachees who feel like they want to experiment and get out of their comfort zone and that kind of thing. I think the creative methods **shift the power balance in the coaching conversation to the coachee**. So that's what the skilled coachee likes, which is why... And I don't know whether it's relevant, but more women tend to choose creative methods than men. In terms of Coachee 4 and the way our coaching conversations are going, what we've decided is that the next one is going to be a peer coaching, so we're going to divide the time and half of it is going to be on her and half of it she's going to be coaching me.

In contrast, however, Coachee 7, who has relatively little experience of being a coach/ professional helper (although significant experience of coaching and of being coached), also was able to engage with creative methods. In this case, Coach 7 had suggested the process and had brought with her a set of clothes buttons, which Coachee 7 used to describe her senior team and relationships between them and her. Coach 7 felt that this ability to engage with different approaches was typical of Coachee 7 and her ability to make good use of the coaching sessions:

Right. Because she's got quite a lot of self-awareness, which may or may not have demonstrated in that session, and because she's got language to describe what's going on in relationships, and because I can often just... sometimes you get somebody that I call blue touch paper people. You just light it and sit back and watch it happen. So I can do that with her and **she just runs and works it all** out for herself with just a gentle question or something like that and/or just the attention from somebody. So she hears herself say things out loud and works out for herself what her options are

However, even though Coach 7 asserts this, Coachee 7, in the paired interview was keen to give much of the credit to Coach 7:

If Coach 7 wasn't so skilled, it would be a complete and utter waste of time. But because she knows me well and she can pick up on areas of difficulty and follow and track them and challenge, then that's why it's worthwhile, isn't it? Whereas if it was somebody that wasn't as skilled and didn't know me, it would just be a cup of a tea with a mate, so..

That said, Coachee 7, in her individual interview, was more willing to concede that she was comfortable with engaging with metaphor and that it had helped her to understand her own situation better as a result as the exchange between Paul and Coachee 7 below, illustrates:

Paul: Now, you've explicitly used something quite symbolic with buttons anyway, so I suppose that was central to it, but that's something else that struck me as being important to the process in some way. That these metaphors give you ways of engaging with the issues. And that ability to play with them or engage with them is part of the process of coaching it seems to me.

Coachee 7: I think that's a really interesting point. Because I do use examples a lot, I suppose, with my team, and you haven't always got an example from work that is usable for whatever reason. And sometimes those sort of

metaphors help explain things in a sort of shorthand but also quite colourful way too

#### *Reflection on Theme*

Of the seven coaching pairs, coaching pairs 4 and 7 were the only two to use creative methods in an explicit way to engage in their coaching conversations. Both Coach 4 and Coach 7 argue that their coachees were more skilled than other clients they are familiar with and so were able to engage with this more difficult process. My sense, however, is that the particular methods used by both coaches were in some ways quite attractive to their respective coaches because they enabled them to break out of conventional coach questioning approaches and move into something more fun and energising; Coachee 4 had, after all explicitly requested to engage in creative methods with Coach 4 was known to prefer such methods, whilst Coachee 7 admitted that she loved buttons as her mother used to encourage her to play with them a lot. In that sense, their degree of engagement with these processes may indicate a greater degree of comfort, as opposed to skill. However, as both coachees acknowledged, words did not always work as effectively for them in terms of addressing things that they wanted to work on. However, another way of understanding this engagement with creative methods is one of playful fascination with a new technique/ game, by both participants, which then enables the coachee to avoid engaging with challenging issues and enables the coach to experiment with new techniques or approaches. Hence, it could be argued that the intervention is as much about the coach as it is the coachee. Whilst there is certainly some element of engagement and camaraderie between the two pairs, which seems to have been engendered by the coaching process, there is also some evidence of challenge introduced by both coaches who use these interventions.

As a therapy client, I experienced significant ambivalence when my therapist wanted to introduce a new technique/approach into our conversations. I initially experienced it as being about their 'pet' technique and it had the impact on me of raising my resistance to engaging with the therapist on the issues. However, my therapist used my resistance to the intervention to gain further insights into the issues rather than

accepting my resistance to it. Nevertheless, my resistance to such methods sits in contrast to all the coachees in terms of their willingness to follow a process path suggested or initiated by the coach, when they believe it will help them to work on issues that are important to them.

#### Reframing thinking- Challenging Dominant Ways of Thinking

Another aspect of Reframing Thinking was the coachees being able to reflect on and challenge their own dominant ways of thinking. Most often, this was done by engaging with and using metaphors. Whilst using metaphors is not necessarily particular to coaching, coachees in the study were comfortable with engaging with their own metaphors and those of others, in the service of developing their own thinking and self-awareness. Hence, coachees in the study were adept at bringing metaphors to the session that the coaches were then able to work and help them re-engage with. This had the impact of enabling the coach to challenge dominant ways of thinking and to use the metaphor to help the coachee to bring new insight to their experiences.

#### *Example 1*

In this example, the coachee is talking about how her direct report is struggling with her role following a re-structure within her organisation:

Coachee 1: I feel absolutely positive that she's **all at sea**, because they have had a very specific role for years, absolutely years, and now I'm asking them to do something completely different. And I have asked what support, you know, they would need to try and make that shift, but at the moment, there hasn't really been anything come back. They're happy just to, you know, have a go and see where it takes them. And a lot of the stuff, it's not like you can go on a course and learn it, you know. This is about going through a process, so... But I think professionally I think Claire particularly feels as if something's been taken away."

Following this, Coach 1 challenges Coachee 1 on whether it is Coachee 1, herself, who is "all at sea" which Coachee 1 then takes up and engages with:

Coachee 1: Oh, I'm definitely **all at sea**. I feel as if I've just got so many things... Oh, God, here I go. I just don't know where to start most of the time and it's that sort of mix of strategic and operational micro stuff and I want to do the strategic stuff. I don't want to get... **it's like getting dragged back**. But that's always how it feels. And I suppose I'm frightened for my own career, because I think I don't want to be somebody that manages like that. That's not what I want to do. I don't really know what I want to do, but certainly not that.

This recognition and engagement with the metaphor enables Coach 1 to encourage Coachee 1 to consider not only a conversation which she needs to have with her direct report but also with her own boss in terms of her own career direction and future. This was done by continually returning to that metaphor and making connections with it e.g. Coach 1 asks questions such as "Do you want to throw them a life line?" Whilst this intervention is clearly also dependent on the coach's skill in recognising and inviting the coachee to engage with the metaphor, the coachee clearly has a part to play in terms of their engagement in the process and in terms of their offering of the metaphor in the first place. Coachee 1, in her individual telephone interview, sees this engagement as being a critical part of the coaching process, for her:

"I mean, in terms of your research, I think it was quite interesting that the parallel process that was going on, that Coach 1 had reflected back to me, and I think you're so busy just getting on with it that you don't always notice it until somebody points it out, and then you go 'of course, I know I noticed that actually before it was pointed out,' but it was an opportunity to think. I think that, for me, that's the best part of the coaching process - often it's not about having actions to go away with, it's just having space to think ... about the existential force, the thing about the very act of agreeing to be coached, sets in motion changes. So, for me, it's not necessarily about setting a specific goal it's just about **allowing your mind to be free** and I think to say out loud things that you've been bottling up, because I think sometimes when you say things out



loud, you know they're not as bad as you thought, or you have to **reframe them** because they don't really make any sense"

In other words, Coachee 1 feels that the active acceptance and engagement of the coachee and, in this particular case, with what the coach offers back in terms of their response to the metaphor, is critical to the success of the coaching session and relationship.

#### *Example 2*

In coaching session 2, Coachee 2 introduces the metaphor of her house being like different areas of her body, very quickly into the coaching conversation. This then seems to enable Coach 2 to make connections between the figurative and the literal throughout the coaching session, particularly in relation to Coachee 2's relationship with her partner, Alistair:

Coachee 2: I think I've gone from still having lots of business ideas and lots of ideas with career and stuff in that area. I've cleaned my house from top... not cleaned, like done stuff, like totally emptied it, which has felt really good. And not just a room, like literally the whole house. I've pulled up carpets and painted floors and done... And I was thinking about that in terms of like **my body as well, thinking how the top is my head and the cellar being my heart.** Don't know why the cellar's my heart. It probably should be my feet or something. So that's kind of happened. I've been seeing a chiropractor for my back.

Coachee 2, throughout the first part of the session, moves between describing her emotions and then the literal clearing out of her attic and her cellar in her house. This enables Coach 2 to make an intervention further into the conversation:

Coach 2: So as you were talking, Coachee 2, what I was... just because of what you said about the upstairs being the ideas and this downstairs, this cellar being the heart, the emotions and you do the work. And there was a lot of just

like how it is between you and Alistair that a lot of stuff that you initiate and do some work, shifting some stuff in the relationship emotionally. And you engage him in some of it and he's happy to go along with it and it gets recycled somewhere else, some of it. And then something else fills that space. But it doesn't sound like you're necessarily choosing what you fill that space with.

Coach 2, therefore, is able to challenge Coachee 2, in terms of her choosing how to manage her own personal relationships.

This challenge was responded to by Coachee 2 by reporting on the therapy session that she had arranged with her husband so, in that sense, the issue about her "filling the space" was not pursued. However, when Paul discussed this with Coach 2 in her phone interview, her view was that her role as the coach was to simply notice and help the coachee to notice this process:

Coach 2: So I might say, you know, again, and possibly 'cause I'm sitting outside now talking to you, that it might be that, there we are walking along and this thing... let's say there's a bird at the side and I say, oh look, there's that bird there, shall we go over and have a look, and the client, Coachee 2 would say ooh no, I don't like the look of that bird. So, okay, so we carry on walking and then, lo and behold, that bird's flown and it's still there. We're somewhere else but that bird is still there, and I might say gosh, that bird is still there [laughing].

Hence, Coach's 2 take on challenge in coaching had an influence here when she was discussing, with Paul, how she responds to a coachee not wanting to pursue an aspect of the conversation. Coach 2's decision to try and be a persistent presence here seems to be validated by Coachee 2's response in the paired interview where she argues that, Coach 2's voice often stays with her:

Yeah. But I'm not quite sure what that what is. Because sometimes I can leave here... I always leave feeling very energised and I always feel just so much more confident about myself. But because I'm on my own a lot that very quickly diminishes and it's yeah, and then it's kind of brought back round really to the

next time I see Coach 2. But then her voice a lot of the time is in my head after the sessions.

It seems as though in this case, the coachee is able to internalise some of the language and mental models used by the coach.

#### *Example 3*

In this example, Coachee 4 uses metaphor to draw out her ambivalent feelings with regard to her full time job and her current boss. She uses the metaphor of a boyfriend/suitor to explain to Coach 4 how she feels in that work context:

"Part of me is thinking **if that was a boyfriend or a potential boyfriend**, I wouldn't be out chasing him. Do you know what I mean? I wouldn't... at my age, at my time of life, if he wants me, come and get me. And that's a bit mad, but that's how I feel. It's like if he wants me, he can come and court me, and part of this well let's see what the deal is on the table, **is a bit like a potential new boyfriend, well what are you offering me?** Because actually being on your own, you know, it's not a problem. So it kind of feels like that, but if you looked a bit through that lens as a kind of relationship, I think well you want me, you make the moves, mate, because I could just walk. I'm making myself laugh over that concept, but that's how it feels."

This enables Coach 4 to engage with this ambivalence and bring in a previously used metaphor of roundabouts, as a proxy for possible career and decision paths as well as making connections with earlier points in the conversation when Coachee 4's sense of self worth was discussed. In her individual coach interview, Coach 4 attributes some of this to Coachee 4's personal qualities and skills and relates these to the metaphors of journey and exploration:

Coach 4: The difference between being on a journey and the difference between being on an exploration. So the journey, you've got a destination, you're on the tramlines of your goal and you're going to get there. The exploration, you don't know what's going to happen. You **stay open** and **you're**

**scanning all the time** for... And I think Coachee 4 is very much more on the exploration"

Coachee 4 herself in her individual interview recognised her ongoing engagement with the metaphors and, in particular, her boss as like a boyfriend metaphor used above:

"The metaphor thing, that's interesting. It's kind of interesting the narrative. And I hadn't realised how much I did it, but I think in terms of my own development I need to **listen to the metaphors** I use. And one of the examples, which had its seeds in that session and then I'd totally forgotten I'd said it, was the stuff about seeing the chief exec as a kind of potential suitor or trying to court him and, you know, having that kind of relationship, organisational relationship. And then I'd sort of said it in a moment and then put it away, didn't even think about it, and then when I was doing the exercise with Coach 4 the last time I saw her about the energy cords and the little work nexus, there was... I'd put [my boss] in, and I was sitting there feeling really hurt that he hadn't sent me an email when I'd sent round the one saying I was going. And Coach 4 reminded me of what I'd said in the session that was filmed and I immediately thought crikey, yes, absolutely, that's what I'm doing. That's the **end of that kind of psychodrama**"

Hence, Coachee 4 seems to have, with the help of Coach 4, identified a unconscious behavioural pattern and chosen to engage with it in a different way by deciding not to perpetuate her hurt feelings in relation to her boss. This recognition of one's own motivation and seeking to deal with it will be explored further when Recognition of Own Values is examined.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

In drawing together this theme, I think there are two separate but related aspects. Firstly, a critical aspect is to offer the metaphor or image to the coach in the conversation and then this can be used as communicative mechanisms that can be moulded and shaped by the coaching pair. The second aspect is that the coachee must

remain open to the manipulation of the metaphor and the challenge that that then brings into the conversation. In the paired interview with Coach and Coachee 1, Paul uses a metaphor that sums it up for me:

Paul : Do you know what it reminds me of? I don't know if you ever used to watch "Whose Line is it Anyway?", the improvisation show?

Coach 1: Yes, Yes

Paul: Do you know the one I mean? It used to have Josie Lawrence and people like that. And I was reading about improvisation and one of the rules of improvisation is that you never refuse a suggestion that somebody makes, 'cause one of the dangers with that sort of comedy is you go for a cheap laugh rather than just going with the suggestion, and it strikes me there's a similarity here with this sort of relationship and conversation, that you're both open to and, as you've just said, you're both open to what comes up, but then prepared to work with it, flesh it out, engage with it, and kind of trusting in that. Is that right?

This offering, accepting and manipulation of a metaphor seems important and is a critical part of the partnership between coach and coachee. Furthermore, as Coachee 4's example, in particular, illustrates, it creates the possibility of the coachee being able to choose different behaviours and perspectives as a result. Again, it is possible to challenge this perspective by arguing that metaphors are a commonplace mechanism which people use to communicate, thus there is nothing particularly significant about coachee metaphors in this context. However, in all of the conversations in this study, coachee metaphors have played a role in helping the coachee interpret their own motivations and ways of seeing things, in collaboration with their coaches. By being able to share their frame of reference in the coaching conversation, the coachees seem to be able to use the exploration of the metaphor as a way of re-examining their actions and behaviours and settling on refinements/ new approaches to the same issues. Furthermore, when coachees did use metaphors, coaches did seem to see them as a vehicle for deepening the conversation with the coachee.

In my own practice as a coach or as a supervisor, I have found it particularly useful when the coachee identifies a metaphor that is particularly vivid for them. This is because it gives the opportunity to work with the metaphor and identify blind spots and limitations with it that can be illuminating for the coachee. I have recognised however, the importance of supervision to me, as both a supervisor and coach, in that I have certain dominant ways of seeing things which can influence my approach to these activities. For example, my engagement with football as a sport can mean that I am often prone to project sport team analogies onto work team situations which can be unhelpful in terms of my ability to see things differently. Hence as a client or coachee, it is important that I am able to render these assumptions explicit so that the helper is in a position to support me in challenging or questioning these dominant assumptions.

#### Reframing Thinking - Scenario Planning

Another mechanism that all coachees displayed in their coaching sessions was the ability to use the conversation as a way of rehearsing what they might do or say in their interpersonal relationships in the future. This gives the coachee opportunity to try things out and see how they sound when talked through with another person. This requires them, to some degree, to suspend their disbelief in terms of the artificiality of the coaching space as a proxy for their personal situations and to experiment in terms of their own thinking/language:

#### *Example 1*

In this example, Coach 6 and Coachee 6 are exploring Coachee 6s business offer as a new coach and Coach 6 challenges Coachee 6 to articulate her "elevator speech" for a potential client:

Coach 6 : I'm interested in having some coaching. I think it would be useful for me. I understand you're pretty good. What can you do for me? Sell yourself.

Coachee 6: Well I'd love to work with you. My approach is really developmental. So I want to work with people who want to really understand themselves and bring in a congruence and an authenticity into to what they do. So I work at the edge of personal and professional, we can go either way, but it's about bringing those two aspects together. So that reduces your stress, increases your productivity and generally makes the world a better place. That's a bit of cliché. It helps your organisation become more a reflection of who you are and your values.

Whilst Coachee 6 was initially reluctant to engage in this process, in the paired interview she did acknowledge that being able to articulate this "for an individual" was useful practice. However, she also acknowledged that practicing this raised an issue of pride for her as a novice coach but experienced in personal development processes:

"Well I think it comes down to... well there's something coming off about not wanting to waste the time and there's a **little bit of pride in there**. There's a little bit of well I know where I'm going, can we just go there? And actually there is a little bit of like I could do this myself, although actually I don't think I could do that myself but it's coming from that place of I know what I'm trying to do, and then say... I call it like pride, you know. It's interesting 'cause I've only just spotted that now and, yeah, but I think there is that attentiveness of the process that's kind of keeping an eye on the coach and making sure they're going where I want to go. So, yeah, **it's quite hidden but it was there**. I wouldn't have been aware of that myself."

The fact that she was pushed to do the elevator speech meant that she was able to notice and become more aware of this issue. Furthermore, in her individual coachee interview, some weeks later, she acknowledged that this had crystallised an identity issue for her in terms of being her full authentic self but in a way which does not alienate people:

I don't know how to bring myself fully in authentically into a space where I'm really being open and sharing and yet not being off-putting or coming across as sort of arrogant or coming across as like crazy and New Age and out there.

In his individual interview, Coach 6 was not as confident that there had been a breakthrough insight but felt that Coachee 6 was making progress through the relationship:

Coach 6: Now whether it was necessarily a light bulb moment I'm not too sure, but certainly in her thinking, and I can say this with confidence, over the three or four occasions when I've done the coaching, you know, she's getting closer to the answer she was looking for. It's trying to formulate the question correctly which is the issue and she spent quite a lot of time trying to do that.

In summary, therefore, the ability to mentally practice and rehearse had yielded some useful insights, albeit not in the way that had been initially envisaged by either the coach or coachee. Whilst the coach was clearly responsible for the initial pressure to engage in this rehearsal, the coachee, nevertheless, was able to engage with that process and use it to reflect on her identity and mission, in terms of her business.

#### *Example 2*

In coaching session 1, Coachee 1 discusses her relationship with her subordinate Claire and how she needs to get something different from her in terms of delivery. In this extract, she uses the conversation with Coach 1 to experiment with how she would like to communicate with Claire going forwards:

Coachee 1: To Claire, I would just say come on, Claire, you know, you have so much ability that, you know, whenever I ask you to do something that's relatively straightforward, and that's the thing, we're not doing rocket science, you know, and although they have been in a particular role, it's not completely removed from the profession, you know, so I just think there's almost a selective incompetence, and I only go in so far. So I would like to say, you



know, don't give me something that will only go so far. Go as far as you can and then we can always take it back the way.

Following prompting from Coach 1, she also rehearses what she wants from her boss, Paul:

Coachee 1: I just can't do every single thing that comes his way in terms of OD. There are some things that maybe he could... you know, not just the odd thing, to really help me out.

The impact of this experimentation is that she realises that she needs to reflect further on whether her role is sufficiently strategic for her at this stage of her career. In her individual phone interview, Coachee 1 articulates her view on how she uses coaching as a process:

Coachee 1: I think sometimes when you say things out loud, you know they're not as bad as you thought, or you have to reframe them because they don't really make any sense. I think that's a really helpful thing to do. I really like the space it gives you just to have thinking time with nobody asking you for things - you know, they're not really demanding anything other than that you go inside your own head. That's probably the most useful part of being coached.

To paraphrase, Coachee 1 uses the coaching space articulate her thoughts and fears, have them probed a little by a coach, but, principally, to hear herself think and to settle on what she really thinks about a particular issue. Whilst the coach's intervention is important, in giving her the encouragement and space to engage with this, the coachee then has the capability to take this opportunity and rehearse what she would like from both relationships.

### *Example 3*

In this example, Coachee 7 is thinking through how she can have a conversation with a challenging member of staff about her approach to working as part of a management

team. She is using the opportunity to articulate her feelings about the member of staff, and consider what sort of conversational strategy is likely to be effective with her:

Coachee 7: If I say to her in my view, for your future, I think these are the issues around your development and I'd like to work with you on how that changes, then we can have a conversation where she says but I don't think it'll change and I say well that's going to be difficult to how you work and then we decide where we go with that. It doesn't have to be a sort of unfair dismissal claim, does it? It just has to be a.. I want to help you do this. Do you want my help or not? Is that going to be advantageous to your career? But I do think I need to... she's too thick skinned to be nuanced about it as well. Yeah, so I think I need to tackle it head on with her really

In this interaction, Coach 7 says little and simply allows Coachee 7 to talk through the issue. Whilst Coach 7's engagement and listening skills are important, Coachee 7 is using the conversation to develop a clear inner picture of the member of staff and what is likely to work in terms of her reaching her goal of working more effectively as a management team. However, it is interesting to note that, in the paired interview, Coachee 7 attributes much of the insight she gets from coaching, to Coach 7:

Coachee 7: If Coach 7 wasn't so skilled, it would be a complete and utter waste of time. But because she knows me well and she can pick up on areas of difficulty and follow and track them and challenge, then that's why it's worthwhile, isn't it? Whereas if it was somebody that wasn't as skilled and didn't know me, it would just be a cup of a tea with a mate, so...

Furthermore, Coachee 7 does not acknowledge her own influence on coaching processes either in the paired interview or individual interview themselves. However, Coach 7's view of Coachee 7 is quite different to that. In her individual interview, Paul asks Coach 7 to what extent she thinks that Coachee 7 is a skilled coachee within the coaching process. She responds:

Coach 7: She's got quite a **lot of self-awareness**, which may or may not have demonstrated in that session, and because she's got **language to describe**

what's going on in relationships, and because I can often just... sometimes you get somebody that I call blue touch paper people. You just light it and sit back and watch it happen. So I can do that with her and she **just runs and works it all out for herself with just a gentle question or something like that and/or just the attention from somebody. So she hears herself say things out loud and works out for herself what her options are.**

Therefore, although Coachee 7 does not, herself, attribute this as a skill, Paul and Coach 7 both observed this ability to talk through a scenario and plan her response.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

In all of the coaching sessions, I noticed the coachees using the space to mentally rehearse decisions they needed to make and to work themselves up to difficult conversations they needed to have with other people. In each case, the coachee's agency, in terms of the meaning that they were taking from those parts of the conversations, was paramount, with the coach, in most cases needing to act as an active listening ear, as opposed to making strong active interventions in the form of questions or comments. This is not to diminish the coach's role in supporting this scenario planning, as without it, the coachee may not have felt sufficiently encouraged/enabled to talk this through. By the same token, without the coachees' ability to visualise and articulate the imagined conversation/scenario, the coach would not be able to support their coachees in this way. Not many of the coachees described their behaviour in these terms, preferring instead to label this as feeling able to "talk something through" with someone else. Nevertheless, this ability to reflect and reframe their thinking seems to be a key part of the added value that coachees get from their coaching sessions, with some requirement on the coachees' own skills to realise that added value. Furthermore, this behaviour seemed to transcend simple description and move towards intention and insight into their current situations.

Reflecting on my own experience of being coached, I recognise that this is something that I tend to do quite often. Unlike Coachee 7, who describes herself as "an inveterate planner", my tendency is to use coaching sessions as a way of talking through my responses to a given scenario. Like the coachees in the study, I have sufficient skills to be able to articulate and present a scenario in the moment which I can then reflect on

and decide whether this is what I truly want to do. This seems to go together with an ability (in myself and in the coachees within the study) to recognise one's own values and emotions and to work with them to decide on an appropriate set of actions, with the support of the coach.

#### Reframing Thinking - Recognition of Own Values and Emotions

As well as using the sessions to mentally rehearse for interpersonal interventions, coachees seemed also to use the coaching sessions to affirm key values and positions they held in relation to their work. This again appeared useful to the coaching process as it enabled them to become self-aware in terms of what emotions and values were driving their behaviour

#### *Example 1*

In this example, Coachee 4 is reflecting on her role as a manager within her organisation and what skill sets and qualities she brings to that role. In her telling of her story about an intervention she makes, she uses the opportunity to articulate to herself and the coach what her core values and qualities are:

Coachee 4: Overtly, I would have said I'm **a confident person in a facilitating role**. I've always gravitated towards these roles where I'm the facilitator and because I'm hardworking and smart, I'm pretty good at that, but actually, it's not my natural... it's not where I am, I'm **more of a shaper or a strategist I think**, and I spoke at an **AGM** last year in front of a large group of managers and then I was looking at the feedback and the feedback was saying... and I was talking about the triple bottom line, where the third bottom line was about humanity really and soul in the organisation and the wellbeing, and somebody fed back it's nice to hear somebody so senior having that faith in people, and I thought, oh right, what's so senior because I don't see myself in that

In the above passage, Coachee 4 appeared to be using the coaching session with Coach 4 as a way of articulating and affirming her values within a work context. The impact of that is that Coach 4 was then able to use a creative methods framework (seen and not

heard) to help the Coachee 4 explore this further. Coach 4, in her individual interview, comments on Coachee 4's recognition of her core values and emotions, in relation to her decision to leave the local authority where she worked and to move into independent consultancy:

Coach 4: there's always the balance for her between bringing in the income and doing something that **she's passionate about**. And I think what's become increasingly... and had in that interview was there was an uncomfortableness in her, she wanted to stay in the council because it guaranteed the income, but **she was increasingly uncomfortable** with her role in that. She's now made a decision about that. Because if she'd have stayed in the council, all she'd be doing would be making people redundant, and she's done that once and she's fed up of doing it, basically.

This self-awareness in terms of recognition and acknowledgement of one's own feelings meant that Coach 4 found it easier, than with other clients, to move things forward. In the extract below, Coach 4 compares her work in therapy and coaching, within a psychiatric setting, to working with Coach 4:

Coach 4: Yes, going back to what we were talking about earlier, I think one of the things I'm profoundly grateful for in my career as a coach is those four years on the acute admission ward of a psychiatric hospital. Because I've actually seen most things and have most threats put on me, "I'm going to kill you with this chair," or, "I'm going to..." you know. So there isn't much that surprises me. And I think the other joy, and it particularly comes out working with somebody like Coachee 4, is that working with people when they're in acute situations means they've got very, very low down if they've got admitted to a psychiatric hospital. So to make any positive step forward, we're talking tiny, tiny steps, and by comparison working with Coachee 4 is like working with somebody on speed, you know, [laughs] it's just amazing.

Hence, Coach 4 recognises that Coachee 4's self-awareness and ability to reflect in the conversation is a skill that is significant in terms of the success of their relationship.

In a similar fashion, Coachee 5 reflects on his core values in the work place. This articulation of what works for him seems to enable Coach 5 to reflect on how he might use those values when bidding for work in a new organisation:

Coachee 5: And therefore from that rapport/trust point of view I function best, I like to be in that space when you've got that **level of trust with people**, 'cause actually, going back to what I said about being forthright, I'm actually also quite disclosive. I'm really **ready to disclose about myself to people**, but I've a real value that I expect that to be repaid, and heightened sense of antenna then. You know when you've kind of, I would use the phrase "been handled", when people are not repaying that level of rapport or honesty, I feel that really quickly and that really turns me off.

Coach 5: Okay. I mean, could you imagine yourself saying, if you were then, you've made this transition -that sounded to me like your opening pitch.

By having the ability to frame and reframe his issues, Coachee 5 is able to move the session forwards and identify an intervention that he might make at work, as well as with a future employer which he feels moves him closer to where he would like to be:

Coachee 5: Yeah, actually it does, doesn't it, thinking about it, and actually there's some things then, isn't there, you know, nothing worse you say hey, so tell me about yourself. You know, actually I'm the one you're supposed to be helping with, so in my experience you reverse the conversation. Let me tell you all about me. And if you're able to be quite disclosive and **talk about yourself and values** and human level, actually all you do is **set a really nice, safe context** for them to repay in kind and then you're away.

Thus, as part of this session, Coachee 5 has been able to state what is important to him by recognising his core beliefs and values. By engaging with Coach 5's comment about pitch, he is then able to reframe his values as an asset that he can use when seeking to engage with a future employer.

*Example 3*

In a similar vein, Coachee 6 explores her own values in terms of her individual practice and how these are enacted currently:

Coachee 6: I have developed a lot of focus and clarity and I'm very good at parking my stuff and there's much less stuff to park these days. So I can pick up... like there's an intuition almost that can just pick stuff up much more cleanly, and that has been built up from the yoga but it's incredibly useful in coaching and the focus and concentration. So there's lots of things like that, and I wouldn't call them values, but there's lots of experience in the yoga that is really useful in the coaching

This then enables Coach 6 to follow with questions regarding Coachee 6's signature presence / unique selling point. In turn, Coachee 6 feels she is better able to articulate what she stands for, through her framing and reframing of these values:

Coachee 6: But it has been helpful in terms of pinning down some of this, which is more about the beliefs and behaviour, but that's okay. Well it's qualities again. Authenticity. A belief in authenticity. A belief in compassion. It's not a belief. It's just compassion's just there, you know. You either are or you aren't, or you're halfway. But it's not something you can believe in. It's there. Insight. Again, you can't believe in insight. Authenticity, yes you can believe in authenticity, but you either are authentic or you're not. Sincerity, you either are sincere or you're not. Congruence, you're either are congruent or you're... yeah, so they're kind of below beliefs in a way because you've got them or you haven't got them.

Hence, Coachee 6 is demonstrating her ability to reflect on her own values and motivations for her action. In his individual interview, Coach 6 confirms this perception, in terms of what he describes as Coachee 6's ability to reflect:

Coach 6: I mean, Coachee 6 certainly is very, very... a very reflective individual and from my point of view it's almost kind of just encouraging and giving the space for her to do the thinking and take things, you know, in a way that works for her. And certainly the thing which I was very, very conscious of was, I mean, at times I didn't really need to do a great deal other than just, you know, through kind of body language, facial expressions just to kind confirm, you know, that she had that space to start to explore things.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

All of the coachees seem to be able to succinctly present their values and challenges in a story and use this as a touchstone for making sense of what actions they need to take next. The coaches are able to engage with these values and ask questions about how they apply, which then enables the coachees to reframe their experiences in the light of these prompts. One interesting aspect of this ability in terms of the coachees was the dual effect of the coachees' coaching experience. On the one hand, the coachees seemed comfortable with articulating these values but, for some - notably Coachees 3, 5 and 6 - the prompting from their respective coaches prompted them to respond as coaches and to reflect on why their coach was asking them such questions. To some extent, this may have interfered with their ability to fully engage with their own values and responses, at times. This might be construed as defensive behaviour but may also be a function of being observed and questioned. Nevertheless, in the individual and paired interviews, the coachees furthered suggested their ability to be aware of their own responses and values and were able to articulate them to Paul and to their coaches (in the paired interview).

Once again, this is not to diminish the coach's role within the conversation. Within all of the conversations, the coaches showed that they were able to work with this self awareness and, by using skilful questioning, helped the coachee to achieve further insights into their own practice.

In terms of my own personal experience, articulating core values and beliefs is something that I have struggled with in my own coaching and helping experiences. As



explored in Chapter 1, this is most likely to be because of my past experiences and the need to protect myself from them. This will be explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed examples from the data analysis process which suggest that there are some processes that coachees engage in which seem to have a functional impact on the coaching process. This functionality is expressed in terms of enabling the coaching to be more incisive and impactful due to the process expertise that the coachees were able to offer in coaching conversations. These process skills were organised into three domains:

- Framing The Conversation
- Understanding Coaching Processes
- Reframing Thinking

Within each of these domains, I have argued that there are different conversational strategies that coachees employ which enable the coach to work with the coachee to progress the conversation towards achieving the coachees' goals. Throughout the discussion of these, I have explored the implications of these domains, not only for coaching participants, but also for myself, principally as a coachee or therapy client. In doing so, I have tried to draw out the meaning of these behaviours for my practice in those roles.

In the next chapter, I will examine two other domains which emerged from the data analysis which influence coaching processes, in a different way. These processes seemed to be driven by a need for the coachee to protect themselves within the conversation and the relationship in order for them to be able to stay in it.

These two chapters will then be brought together and discussed, in the Conclusions Chapter and integrated with the theoretical insights gleaned from the Literature Review Chapter.

## Findings: Defensive Mechanisms Chapter

### Chapter Introduction

In this Chapter, I examine data from the data collection process which suggests that coachees engage in defensive processes within the coaching conversations. As with the previous chapter, I will also make connections with personal experience and drawing inferences for my own personal reflexivity. Finally I will summarise what conclusions can be drawn and then look forward to the Conclusions Chapter.

### *Data Analysis*

A key message to come out of the data collection process was that the coachee - either consciously or unconsciously - finds ways of protecting themselves within coaching conversations and relationships. These processes are functional for the coachee, as they enable them to avoid topics and questions that are, at that time, too challenging or risky to engage with. In particular, by exercising these techniques, coachees are able to stay in the conversation and in the relationship, in the longer term. This can be done in a number of ways, but which come under the broad headings of Deflection and Diversion.

### Deflection - Distancing Language

Deflection skills are used by coachees, often unconsciously, to move the relationship and conversation away from areas that are too challenging or risky for coachee. This can be enacted in a number of ways as the following examples illustrate. One way coachees seemed to do this was by using conversational strategies that distanced the coachee from the topic under discussion. One practical manifestation of this was when coachees use "you" instead of "I", in response to a challenge or question from their coach.

### *Example 1*

In the extract below, between Coach 1 and Coachee 1, the coachee is discussing the challenges she is facing when trying to have a difficult work conversation with someone she line manages, about her work performance. In particular, she is trying to talk through the relative advantages and disadvantages of doing this, with Coach 1:

Coachee 1: So I think there may be an element of fear that if I have a conversation with her, then it comes back to bite **me**.

Coach 1: Okay. So say a bit more about the fear.

Coachee 1: The fear. I suppose it's all about the, you know, making sure that **you're** working within.... that if **you're** having a conversation with somebody about stepping up, that **you're** doing it within parameters of with counsel guidance.

Coach 1: Okay, and I'm noticing as I'm listening to you that you're using language that's outside of yourself rather than focusing on what's your fear.

It is noticeable, in this extract that the coachee - in response to being asked to focus on her fear - moves away from use of "I" and "me" in the conversation. Whilst it might be possible to argue that this is just a linguistic feature of the way people talk, in this instance, there does seem to be a distinct attempt by the coachee to distance themselves somewhat from the emotional content i.e. her fear. This was also noticed, in the session by the coach, as shown above. However, in the paired interview, that took place directly after the coaching session, Paul raised this moment as a point to reflect on in the session, but the coachee did not seem to recognise this interpretation at this time:

Paul: The other thing I was going to ask you about was, Coach 1, you came in with quite a strong challenge when Coachee 1 was talking about... you'd asked her about what she felt herself and then you used language and you said, that's language that's outside of yourself. When you stepped back from that, what do you think was going on there?

Coachee 1: " I think it was just because local government, **you're** so careful about... there's so many processes and procedures which govern absolutely everything, so, you know, **I'm** very conscious that **you** do have to be careful about how **you** go about something"

What was also noticeable was that her response, in the paired interview, also featured this different use of language as indicated by the use of "you" in bold. In other words, even in the paired interview session, the coachee seems to be engaging with the same conversational strategy as in the coaching session. The coachee seems to be denying (a) that her fear was the issue and (b) that she had engaged in any deflection with Coach 1. However, in contrast to that, Coachee 1, in the telephone interview with Paul, some weeks later, recognised that she had in some way sought to protect herself from having to deal with that:

Coachee 1: The thing that I did reflect on personally was the bit about **me** using language outside of self, and what I hadn't taken on, what Coach 1's take on it was, you know which was about **me** detaching myself.. I think at the time I just batted that back because I don't think that was really what was going through me, but I think on reflection, you know, turning it into that organisational context, makes it easy to be, you know, 'oh, it's not about me'. You know I can see that there's something going on there that I wasn't taking on.

Her description of having "just batted that back" does seem to indicate that this deflection activity, by the distancing language described above, was enacted at an unconscious level. Also, the language used here to recount this contrasts with the use of "you" in both her response in the paired interview, as well as in the coaching session itself. Coach 1 also felt that there was some learning for her, despite having challenged Coachee 1 on this in the coaching session, in terms of the degree of challenge she offered in the session:

Coach 1: I think there was an element of me noticing patterns but not perhaps challenging those patterns as much as I would in another relationship. That was actually quite a profound thing for me to notice."

Coach 1 felt that she had been drawn into colluding with the coachee somewhat by not pushing the challenge further, perhaps due to her picking some aspect of the

coachee's desire to protect her team member and this resulting in Coach 1 seeking to protect Coachee 1 in the coaching session, in the same way:

Coach 1: And I think there might have been a parallel process because, again my reflection was you know she talked about wanting to look after her team member and I wondered if that was an unconscious invitation for me to look after her

Coach 1 also reflected, using the same idea of parallel processing, that Coachee 1, being a coach in training herself, wanted to give Coach 1 and Paul the impression that she was skilled and understood the coaching process herself:

Coach 1: I think she wanted to be stroked for being a trained coach, so noticing that she was in tune with things like parallel coaching. The lack of stroking that she gets in the organisation - you know the lack of "you're doing a really great job" and her inability to tell herself that she's doing a really great job. And, all of those things on reflection resonated for me, because I was conscious that I wanted you to go away thinking that I was a great coach. Although that wasn't particularly on my radar screen in the moment - it did come up for me on reflection.

In other words, Coach 1 recognised that she had also, perhaps, picked up on Coachee 1's unconscious need to be valued and supported in her role at work and that this had impacted on her (Coach 1's) performance by raising in her, at some level, some performance anxiety within the coaching session.

Drawing these elements of data together suggests a number of things. Firstly, the coachee, as shown in this example, can find ways of moving away from issues and topics that they find distressing. One way of doing this is, rather than using "I", is to use language that's more third person and general which has the benefit, for the coachee, of not having to face the difficult emotion directly and own it.

This could have made it more difficult for the coach to probe these difficult areas and to invite the coachee to become more self-aware of their own processes and drivers. In this example, the coach does challenge the coachee on this but, even then,

acknowledges that this coachee strategy (amongst others) may have influenced the amount of challenge that she put into the coaching session, overall.

It is also noticeable that when Paul raises the same issue in the paired interview, the conversational strategy is very similar, as indicated above in bold which suggests that Coachee 1 was, in fact, using the same strategy in the paired interview, to protect herself from having to face this. Paul does, in the paired interview, pursue the point with a follow up question and suggests an interpretation:

"Right. See, I wondered whether there was something else going on there which I thought... I thought Coach 1 was challenging your... when I watch people when it gets emotional, people have ways of protecting themselves, so I was speculating whether your deliberate shift from talking about you to talking about something that was depersonalised, was a kind of way of protecting yourself with that."

However, the response is similar, in that Coachee 1 does not accept this interpretation. It is also pertinent to note that, like Coach 1 above, Paul does not then continue this challenge within the paired interview, suggesting that the coachee's intervention had a similar impact on him as on Coach 1. Nevertheless, in the telephone interview, Coachee 1's comments support the view that (a) this protection mechanism was being utilised, that (b) it was not a deliberate, conscious strategy on the part of the coachee and that (c) her extensive use of first person, at this later point, suggests an ability to reflect critically on her own responses and motivations. Hence, the power and agency of coachees is illustrated in this series of conversations by Coachee 1's deflection by use of distancing language - evidenced by her replacing "I" with "You" to serve different conversational purposes which suggests a significant degree of skill on the part of the coachee in this coaching relationship, albeit at an unconscious level.

#### *Example 2*

In the extract below, like in the first example, Coach 3 is talking to Coachee 3 about their fear (in this case, of running workshops as a consultant):

Coach 3: "When fear raises its head, what does that make you do?"

Coachee 3 : "Well it constrains **you**. It restricts **you** in terms of being relaxed. Well it constrains **you**.. **You** don't... **I** don't do things as well as **I** could do because **I'm** not going with the flow and **I'm** thinking about me as opposed to thinking about clients, and I'm not in the here and now and in the flow or anything like that. "

As with Example 1, Coachee 3 changes her language to be more distant and less first person, in response to a question that might force her to face a difficult emotional issue: fear.

What is noticeably different here, however, is that Coachee 3 seems to correct herself after noticing that she had responded to the question in the third person, and quite deliberately using "I "again in the rest of the response.

When Paul raised this as an issue in the paired interview, Coachee 3 supported this interpretation:

Paul: "I think you asked the question, I can't remember exactly the words, I think you said, "What's the fear do to you?" or something like that, or, "How does it make you feel?" or something like that. And it was interesting the language you used"

Coachee 3: "What did I say?"

Paul: "You said, "It restricts you"."

Coachee 3: "Yeah".

Paul: "So first of all that wasn't "I", it was in the abstract. However,..."

Coachee 3 : "Later on I changed that."

Paul: "Yes, you did".

Coachee 3 : "Because then I went back into the oh, God, I need to be back into there.

Paul : "That's what was interesting. So I thought that was a good example of what you were talking about because you then said... you then actually almost

reprimanded yourself and you said, "No, I, I don't do things..." So your language then shifted."

Coachee 3: "And that's where those voices in my head, 'cause I was thinking then... 'Cause what I'd done is I'd analysed it and, you know, I had put my coach hat on thinking ooh, there you are in the third person."

In the above passage, Coachee 3 suggests that her initial response was an instinctive one, in terms of distancing herself from directly facing the fear by using "you" instead of "I" but was clear that she had realised this half way through the sentence and modified this. However, she attributes this to having some experience as a coach. In contrast to Coachee 1, however, she does not recall the issue strongly in the individual interview (albeit some time later). In the extract below, she comments on this after describing her process of self monitoring her own behaviour:

Coachee 3: "So I just have this little conversation going on in my head and, you know, we are all the product of what goes on in our head really, aren't we?"

Paul: "Well, it's interesting 'cause I think I mentioned in the notes where you kind of caught yourself doing it and you really were deliberate when you were saying, "I" [*l a u g h s*]."

Coachee 3: "So that conversation must have gone... I must have been conscious of it at the time. I can't actually remember it specifically, but I must have had that little conversation in my head subconsciously for me to change that."

Coach 3 did remember this aspect of the session and felt that this was an example of deflection:

Coach 3: I guess that's what she was expressing, wasn't it, with that kind of, well, I'm going... as the defence mechanism, she was using it as a defence mechanism, wasn't she, kind of very much like, I'm going to deflect this away and kind of say... and answer it as, well, this is what you would do, not... because it depersonalises it, doesn't it, and I guess she didn't want to talk about stuff that was personal



From this example, it can be seen that the use of "you" instead of "I" can, as suggested earlier, be an instinctive response but, also, that coachees can recognise when they are doing this and, on occasions, seek to change their behaviour. Coach 3's take on this, however, suggests that this is, to some degree, conscious. This is supported by a shift in Coachee 3's language later on in the original coaching session itself where she seems to retain the distancing language but include the word "I":

Coach 3: "Okay. Is it scared? If you were to draw out, is it scared, is it that you don't want to do it or is it that you're not interested? Which is the main thing, do you think?"

Coachee 3: "That's an interesting question. I think there is... **I don't think it's quite as clear cut as that.** I think **there is an element of fear** and **there is an element of I'm not sure** I particularly want to do this because I'm not sure I particularly want to work, if the truth be known, but..."

Here, the phrase "there is an element of" appears to be performing a similar function for the coachee in terms of enabling them to avoid directly saying "I am frightened" or "I don't want to work anymore"

Nevertheless, Coachee 3 is clearly making some efforts to regulate her language in the light of the "unconscious voice" that she refers to, by attempting to bring this voice into her conscious awareness. In her telephone interview she recognised that she needed the coaching process, and the interventions of the coach to assist her in doing this:

"They take you to places that you don't particularly want to go and you sometimes don't go to if you're coaching yourself and I think that's good and it's good for me because, you know, I have a tendency to avoid that and I know I avoid it and sometimes I can make myself go there, but they also offer insights that you can't... that I don't come up with myself, and you think, oh, why didn't I think of that, and so I think it's good"

By recognising the limits of her own self coaching processes, Coachee 3 acknowledges the importance of the coaching relationship to her development, together with her understanding of herself and her own tendencies within that.

In her individual interview, Coach 3 felt that the impact of the research process was important that Coachee 3 was able to admit - in the paired interview - that she had engaged in deflection. In addition, she felt that the process had some extent mitigated the effect of the deflection by re-strengthening the relationship:

Coach 3: Yes, see, in some ways I think it **strengthens the relationship**, doesn't it, 'cause you've had that **shared experience** for a start off, so you've got that kind of **common bond** where, you know, we've had that insight into both of us really in terms of how we felt about... which you wouldn't normally have, you know, apart from obviously through an evaluation or something like that, which is not as in depth, and I think that was one of the things that was of real value with you being there, with just being able to talk about, actually, as a coach, these are the kind of things that I felt, how did you feel, and getting that **real feedback from the individual** about, you know, how it was for them and that focus on them was really interesting, from that perspective, 'cause you're used to, aren't you, as I've said, about people observing you and your behaviour and feeding that back, but not getting the feedback from the individual who was being helped. So I really liked that, I really thought that was invaluable. To think about, even the fact that **they recognise that sometimes they'd slacked** or, you know, they'll **avoid answering it** or they'll try and generalise it or that kind of stuff, even though you know that. To know that in their head, they also recognise that, is quite valuable, I think.

It seems that, for Coach 3, this intervention had some benefits for her own development, like those normally expected from coach supervision i.e. feedback from a third party and feedback from the client. Also, she felt that the coachee themselves had benefitted from the process in terms of being more self aware of her own processes. This was supported by Coachee 3 herself, who in her individual interview felt that the feedback about her own resistance was " a bit of an eye-opener for me and that's a learning point for me".

#### *Example 3*

This deflection by use of distancing language was also present in Coachee 7's session. Coachee 7 was discussing her leadership style with Coach 7 about how she dealt with

appearing vulnerable to a member of her staff. Coach 7 was probing this aspect of her leadership approach in the coaching session:

Coach 7: "Okay. So how easy do you find it to be vulnerable with her or let her in?"

Coachee 7: " I mean **she'd** be party to, you know, on Monday **we** have an executive management team for a couple of hours and that is informal and... It's **an interesting question** because she was the... I've totally blocked off on Thursday for the funeral of my niece and so I'm going to take Friday off because my son's back from Kuwait to go to the funeral. She was the last person I told in the executive team that I wouldn't be in. So maybe there is something in that."

Coachee 7 in this extract appears, at first glance to answer the question in a reasonably open and engaging manner. However, by examining this example more closely, she does seem to employ some distancing language by not referring to herself and her emotions directly. Whilst seeming to answer the question, Coachee 7 avoids directly discussing her feelings of vulnerability and what risks might be involved in this for her. The deflection is subtle but has the benefit of deflecting the coach away from probing how Coachee 7 feels about being vulnerable with her staff member, which may be risky for her to deal with. Paul raised this in the paired interview although there was little overt comment from Coachee 7 at this point except that she felt that this was "interesting". In the telephone interview, however, Coachee 7 did acknowledge this:

Coachee 7: I think I recall you mentioning and thinking at the time that that was very perceptive, 'cause I think it was areas that I probably did feel more uncomfortable with. I mean, you know, I've known Coach 7 for a while now and, generally speaking, I'm pretty open and, you know, don't sort of think there are things that aren't capable of discussion or question. But there's obviously something there from that that means that perhaps there is more, or less comfort, might be a better way of saying it, than I thought.

Coach 7, in her phone interview, attributed this distancing language as being a function of Paul's presence in the coaching session:

Coach 7: And I think there were quite a few strands that we've come across before. I think it did make a difference that you were there..

Paul: Oh, so it was me rather than...

Coach 7: I think so because we've talked about her personal life quite a bit. I don't have any worries about going there. We've talked about whether she wants that, whether it's appropriate, whether she finds it helpful

This suggests that, not only was Coachee 7 exercising deflection against the Coach but was also using this in relation to Paul both in the paired interview and in the individual interview. Coach 7, in her individual interview, attributes Coachee 7's guardedness to events in her personal life which have affected her ability to admit vulnerability:

Coach 7: And some of the behaviour she's uncomfortable with in herself now, she knows where they come from now as it were. And sometimes, we're working on those sorts of things, how far she's hide-bound by how she used to be and/or what happened in her upbringing, as opposed to coming to something both at work and in her personal life in a fresh way

However, in the paired interview, there was evidence that Coachee 7 was willing to examine her own motivations and challenges, from the coaching session. For example, she does comment on why she feels uncomfortable about disclosure with the member of her staff and suggests here that guardedness is not a normal state for her:

Coachee 7: The thing about vulnerability is fascinating actually 'cause I, if I... I think I've said it to you before, Coach 7, that I... before I took this job, I thought I'll be different this time. I'm going to be much more reserved about what I tell people about myself, you know, I'm just going to be more detached, and I never can. I mean, you know, yeah first day and oh, I've been married three times, na-na-na-na-na, just bleurgh, and I can't do it. And yet that thing about

being vulnerable to Staff Member 1 in if you take that as in the sense of opening up and knowing and things, that does disturb me. But I think that's because I don't trust her. And I think that's, you know, that bit about the... getting my back and things, I just feel that she's just waiting for me to make a mistake and that there's something that I can't quite articulate there that means that that's why it was such a sort of "ooh" moment.

However, it is noticeable that Coachee 7 is not actually commenting on her deflection process but on justifying why she should be guarded with her staff member - "I don't trust her". In doing so, she manages to successfully side step the suggestion that she was not being open, but in a way that appears open and disclosing. It is also noticeable, from Coach 7's comments in the paired interview, that she felt she "could have been harder" which suggests that, in that sense, Coachee 7's unconscious defensive processes were successful, to some extent, in deflecting the Coach from pressing further into more difficult areas.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

What I noticed from this was that there were definite shifts in the language that coachees used to answer questions and challenges from their coaches. These shifts often occurred unconsciously and can be quite subtly enacted. When reflecting on those experiences in the interviews, all of the coachees recognised their ability to do this but seemed not to be fully aware that this was happening in their conversations, at the time or even directly afterwards. What was intriguing was that, as part of the research process, it appeared that I was susceptible to the same tendencies as expressed by the coaches. Reflecting back on some of interviews, I can see that I was often drawn into not pursuing certain areas if I perceived them as challenging for the coachee, once the coachee had deflected my initial questions. This was despite my intention to probe and try to understand what participants' perceptions were of what was happening. At the time, it felt as though I had probed these areas sufficiently but, reflecting back on the conversations, I recognised that, on occasions, some of the coachees had successfully deflected me in terms of my ability to pursue those lines of questioning. Furthermore, as the examples demonstrate, the coachees are not always

aware that they are responding in this way. It is possible to argue that an alternative way of seeing this is that the coaches (and indeed myself!) were not sufficiently skilled in terms of their questioning and that any successful deflection or movement away from challenging areas was a function of some lack of comfort that the coach had in working with these issues. However, this interpretation is questionable because (a) in some cases, the coach does return to the issue and (b) they sometimes choose not to challenge at particular junctures in the conversations, as supported by their paired and individual interviews.

In my reflections on my own behaviour as a helpee within helping relationships, I can also recognise these processes being used but, often, I can only recognise these in hindsight, as I often feel that, at a conscious level, I am being open and trying to answer the question. Examining my responses as both researcher and supervisor in these sessions, I can see that the impact on me, rather like Coach 1, above, tended to be that I was less likely to challenge/ follow up on the changes in language. Whilst I do not believe that they were deliberate attempts at deception, the coachee seems skilled in the way that they apply these behaviours, even, if they are, for the most part, unconscious in nature. For my own part as a coachee, my tendency is not to use distancing language - perhaps due to my own experience of coaches and coach training - but I recognise that I have other strategies (discussed below) that I tend to engage in.

#### Deflection- Distancing Language (Abstraction)

Another way in which a coachee might deflect the coach away from challenging or difficult areas in a conversation is through moving the conversation away from the personal and emotional arenas, to ones that are concerned with definitions, concepts or technical issues. These discussions tend to be more abstract, less personal and, thus, less emotive. This has the advantage, for the coachee, of appearing open and engaged with the discussion but in a way that distances the coachee from the emotional content of it. This also has the benefit of continuing the dialogue and building the relationship between coach and coachee.

In this example, Coachee 3 is discussing her resistance in delivering training as part of their work as a consultant. She is seeking to explore with Coach 3, the source of this resistance and trying to identify things that she might do to overcome this resistance:

Coach 3: "Okay. So, from your self-reflection then you've identified probably two or three things that you feel probably are things that are helping to add to this resistance around the training. Is there any resistance around training as a word in itself?"

Coachee 3: "That's an interesting question. I think there is in that it turns me off. So it's not so much resistance but that's to me I think where the technical side of it comes in, where I'm thinking I don't want to be a trainer. I want to be more of a facilitator and leading a workshop"

Coach 3: So tell me what the difference is between a trainer and a facilitator?

In this example, Coach 3 is trying to probe about what the resistance to training is about. What seems to happen, however, is that Coachee 3 begins by addressing this but then moves the conversation into "the technical side of it", regarding whether she wants to be a facilitator rather than a coach, which is different from dealing with her own resistance to doing and training and where that might come from. The impact on Coach 3 and the conversation is that Coach 3 seems to be drawn into a more conceptual debate, as opposed to pushing Coachee 3 further about her resistance, at this stage in the conversation:

Coach 3: Okay. Tell me about the different skills that you might find within a trainer and within a facilitator?

Coachee 3: That's an interesting question. I suspect a trainer perhaps a little bit more stereotypical but probably more detail-focused, whereas the facilitator is more big picture-making links and looking at outcomes. I think some trainers perhaps are in Myers Briggs terms more extroverted preference, whereas some facilitators could be both, but they're less of a... that they blend into the group more rather than being the focus of the group, I suppose, whereas the trainer is in control. I perceive the trainer to be in control and stood there at the front

and the expert really. Whereas the facilitator isn't necessarily the expert but uses... they have some certain skills which they use more efficiently, like the listening questioning type skills.

Whilst, at first glance, a discussion examining the relationship between training and facilitation seems pertinent, the focus has moved away from the root of Coachee 3's resistance and what might lie behind that, to the safer topic of definitional differences between the training and facilitation. This more rational, abstract debate within the coaching session was at odds with the more challenging aspects of the coachee trying to articulate their resistance and why they wanted to work on this resistance in the first place.

Paul raised this issue with Coachee 3 in the paired interview in terms of observing a contrast between her use of language when engaging with emotional topics:

Paul: "Yeah. But I think what I was noticing at times there was a contrast between that quite rational talk about the resistance and when you were actually feeling it.

Coachee 3: "Yeah. And I've learnt over the years, as I've been practicing to try and move away from a T to an F, if you like, in Myers-Briggs terms, to try and experience that. So I've been working with a very strong F to learn more about that. So I've started talking more about my feelings, not very comfortably but I have been talking about my feelings."

Again, what is noticeable here is that there is a similar pattern of language being used, in response to this observation. Coachee 3, in the paired interview itself, seems to be engaging in a rather similar debate where concepts, tools and definitions seem to dominate the response, ironically, when she is trying to report an improvement in talking about her feelings. Rather than answering Paul's question by actually engaging with and talking about her feelings, she chooses, again, to use the language of concepts and theory to answer the question which has the benefit of distancing her from her feelings of resistance, and in particular, the possibility that she might have actively avoided discussing it. However, in the individual telephone interview, she



recognised that this was happening and that she would reflect on it in her own practice as a trainer but also as a coach herself:

Coachee 3 : I suppose, just listening to you reflect there, I suppose what, now I'm thinking about it, I didn't think about it earlier, but what surprises me is the fact that I perceived that I was being open and honest. I knew there was an element of resistance, but I hadn't, until I read the notes, I hadn't appreciated there was quite so much resistance as there is when you read the notes. So I suppose that's a bit of an eye-opener for me and that's a learning point for me. I don't quite know how I'm going to use it in terms of my style and my approach, but also when I'm coaching other people who might be also resisting.

Coach 3 also recalled this part of the coaching session and recognised that, at times, she had allowed Coachee 3 to deflect her onto other conversational areas. However, Coach 3 felt that it was important to do this in service of the relationship and that it gave Coachee 3 the opportunity to think it through for herself:

Coach 3: I guess what I was trying to do was give her, by not probing and not challenging her early on, was giving her a chance to see if she would move forward herself. So I guess there was that conscious... so I think you're right. I think there was that conscious bit

Once again, there is some evidence of skilled coachee behaviour in this example in terms of their engagement with defensive processes like deflection which - in this case by engaging in an abstract discussion about definitions of training and facilitation - enabled the coachee to affect the conversation and relationship. This seems to be functional for the coachee in that it allows them to engage with issues at a comfortable distance but may be dysfunctional in terms of actually getting to the root of the issue. The coach's view was that she chose not to challenge the coachee on this, rather than being successfully deflected. However, it is noticeable that it is only in the paired interview itself that Coach 3 acknowledges the defensive behaviour. Hence, there seems to be some evidence to suggest that Coachee 3's deflection was, at least partly, successful.

In this example, Coachee 6 wanted to engage with Coach 6 in thinking about expanding her coaching and workshop delivery business and, in particular, to focus on what her business stands for and how best to sell that in the market place. In service of this, Coach 6 asked Coachee 6 to articulate her values:

Coachee 6: I know I'm getting confused about the beliefs and the values. Is a value a belief? It feels like it's something a bit deeper than that, but I can't quite... I need to look it up the dictionary or something, but I can't quite put my finger on what it is. So my belief might be that I should be honest where it's appropriate and avoid being dishonest. Sometimes it's appropriate not to say something and of course **we** always choose what we say, but **we** can say something really sincere but we may choose not to say something because it might hurt somebody, you know

In this response, Coachee 6 seems to be answering the question in terms of her own values. However, on closer examination, she has begun to engage in a more abstracted debate about values, beliefs and honesty. By engaging in this more conceptual debate, she successfully deflects the conversation away from going deeper into the personal. In the paired interview, Paul asks about this in terms of Coachee 6's steering of the conversation into certain areas. Coachee 6 responds:

Coachee 6: Well, I think that was because I was sitting here thinking so did I boundary the conversation because there was something I was trying to defend against or did I boundary it because I really wanted to get to the bottom of this and I didn't want to go off on a tangent? And I think it was the latter. So I don't feel that there is... well maybe I'm wrong, but maybe you can ask me some really difficult questions over dinner, but I don't feel there's anything kind of touchy I'm avoiding, but it's that I really wanted to get to the bottom of it.

In this context, Coachee 6 is quite clear that her approach was about focus. However, in the telephone interview, some weeks afterwards, she acknowledged that, at some level, she was trying to protect herself from being too exposed within the coaching session and the paired interview:

Coachee 6: But I've kind of reflected on it more and I realised that what was behind that was actually trying to protect really saying what has been going on for me

In the individual interview, Coachee 6 revealed that she had been going through an alternative developmental process which stemmed from her personal practice within personal development work in retreats. This process was something that she wanted to keep separate from her work with Coach 6 but part of the impact of this alternative process was that it gave her a sense of superiority with regard to engaging with personal development work such as coaching. Coachee 6 therefore felt that this did spill out into her session with Coach 6 although she had worked to contain it:

Coachee 6: ... it was clearly apparent that I was kind of steering the conversation as the coachee and we kind of left it at the point of, well, I'd felt there was a certain amount of what I called pride, or you could call it arrogance, if you like, in that, oh I know better. [Laughs]

It was this sense of needing to contain this pride/arrogance that Coachee 6 felt had prompted the abstraction and steering of the conversation to divert the session away from areas of her life and work that she did not want to engage with at that point. This distancing was also recognised by Coach 6 who recognised the impact that this had on his ability to explore certain areas within the coaching session itself:

Coach 6: I don't think there's any question about that. I think that's absolutely true. I mean there are certainly things I would have quite liked to explore where, yeah, I mean whether she just doesn't want to go there I'm not sure, but that's probably true. I mean whether it's a bit cosy, you know, would be an absolutely legitimate question to ask."

Coach 6 seems to be attributing the 'cosiness' of the conversation to the impact of Coachee 6's diverting strategies which seemed to block off these difficult conversational routes. Indeed, in this example, the coachee seems to be using this in a

more (though not completely) deliberate, conscious way, to avoid disclosing things in a coaching conversation about herself and her situation.

#### *Example 3*

In this example, the coachee has expressed an interest in seeking to market themselves elsewhere. Here, like with Coachee 6 above, Coach 5 asks Coachee 5 a direct question about how they would market themselves to him:

Coach 5: If you were pitching to me, what would you say I was looking for in you?

Coachee 5: I think if ... if you're looking at outplacement then I think person-centred, value base, supportive, would be a personal characteristic that you would look for. But I think from a technical expertise point of view you would want somebody who could kind of inspire, motivate, help people understand, diagnose what the career structure looks like, identify competence and help them, or transition people into a new role. So I think... but to do that in a supportive ways. So I think it would be that mixture of technical capability around understanding the recruitment market and tools and helping people transition through that change process and get their head into the right space.

It is noticeable here that, in response to a direct challenge from Coach 5 to 'pitch' to him, Coachee 5 responds in an indirect way which deflects attention away from him selling himself to Coach 5 directly and he moves the discussion onto a more abstract level rather than focussed on him and what he can offer to another organisation. Whilst it seems pertinent to the question asked, Coachee 5 has removed himself somewhat from the context and focussed more on the technical requirements of a developmental role. Again, this seems to be deflection at quite a subtle level, in that Coachee 5 appears to be answering the question but seems to respond in a more abstract fashion, as though he is talking about someone else, in very general terms, and thus seems to resist the invitation to sell himself and his skills to Coach 5.

All of these examples seem to show a different mode of deflection behaviour on the part of the coachee - that of distancing oneself from a situation through abstraction. Abstraction in this context seems to be where the coachee seeks to depersonalise the conversation by moving it into areas where it is possible to discuss definition of terms and to neutralise the emotive aspect to conversations. Because the coachee appears to be still in the conversation and answering the question posed by the coach, this interpretation of this behaviour could be challenged. It could be argued that the coachee is simply answering the question in a adult and logical fashion and that there is no attempt to deflect. However, as the examples illustrate, this behaviour becomes evident when the coachee is in difficult territory within the conversation. As when coachees use language outside self, there appears to be a movement away from the personal and the context specific to more general definitional debates. This shift seems to happen at an unconscious level for the coachee but, nevertheless, seems to be a deliberate, instinctive response to feeling stuck or challenged. This seems to suit the coachee as it enables them to stay in the conversation and keep the relationship going with the coach but is also functional in that it deflects both them and the coach away from areas of stuckness or difficulty. In some sense, it may also suit the coach as they too have an interest in maintaining the communication and relationship. However, what may be sacrificed, at the point in time, is the benefit of going more deeply into those more personal, challenging areas.

As with using language outside oneself, I can recognise the impact of the coachee's behaviour on both myself as researcher and on the coach in the coaching sessions. It can be quite easy and seductive to engage with the coachee at this level as it feels as though they are being appropriately challenged and engaging in the conversation. However, it is noticeable with each of these, the coachee is not committing to any different or further actions but is instead seeking to defend and justify an existing position. As a result, this behaviour can be difficult to notice and work with, in the moment. Again, this has the benefit of perpetuating the dialogue between coach and coachee and building the relationship but in a way that keeps the conversation at a depth and distance that I am comfortable with. In a sense, this is one of the challenges of working with someone who has a working knowledge of developmental work.

I recognise this in myself working as a helpee with other professionals, either in therapy, coaching or supervision. At the time, I feel that, like the coachees, I am being open and honest and holding nothing back. However, in hindsight, my knowledge of coaching processes, language and models has been a useful distraction in coaching sessions as it has enabled me to divert attention away from me and my issues, to a safer topic that is more distant from these feelings. Whilst this is not ideal in terms of dealing with core emotional issues, and moving forward, it has the positive impact of enabling me to stay in the conversation and the relationship.

#### Diversion- Self-Deprecation

Another key defensive behaviour that coachees seem to engage with is one of diversion. Here, like with deflection the coachee uses conversational devices to close down areas of conversation that are challenging by diverting the coach away from those areas. One such mechanism is that of the coachee being openly critical of their own behaviour. This can come across to the coach as being honest and open and evidence of the coachee facing up to their challenges and shortcomings. However, it can also have the impact of holding the conversation and relationship in its current state and restricting options for moving forwards.

This is done in a number of ways but often seems to have the benefit of protecting the coachee from having to take a risk, do something different or to move into a conversational area that they are not comfortable with. This is often done at a deeply unconscious level.

#### *Example 1*

In this example, Coachee 5 is considering a move into a more developmental role as a coach with a private coaching company from his current full time management position in a manufacturing firm. In this extract he is expressing his doubts about himself and his readiness to move into that position:

Coachee 5: Well it almost going back to that imposter syndrome thing that oh, my God, if I've not got all these people around me, am I going to get found out? Will I ever get work? And that kind of is irrational and emotional because, yeah, of course I would, but it's that thing oh, God, I'm I just going to end up sitting on my backside and being a lazy couch potato? No, I'm not because it's not in my character, but you just think mm, what if nobody wants me? Am I as good as all that?

Coach 5: Okay. So it's the doubts about your own quality and ability. What evidence would you have to say that might be true or not?

Coachee 5: I would say I think for me it's the opposite. It's not that I don't have evidence that that's true. It's that I don't have evidence that it is yet and of course the only way to ever find it is to go and test it.

Coach 5: Are there elements of... well, what would those tests be then? What would be the result of those tests that say yes, I feel I can do it?

In this extract, the coachee appears to be being quite open and honest about his self doubts and, furthermore, is raising the possibility of testing this in some way. However, it is noticeable that, following the coach's invitation to explore those doubts further, he shifts the conversation from consideration of those doubts themselves towards how to test them. Hence, the coach has been successfully diverted away from probing more into Coachee 5's feelings and is now more focused on how Coachee 5 might check out his assumptions. In his individual telephone interview, Coachee 5 acknowledges this behaviour:

Coachee 5: You know, where you keep... as a coachee, prepared to go to a certain level then push people away. I mean actually the number of times I'd kind of done that over that coaching session but in other events, but actually it's very, very easy, particularly spending a time as a trainer that you create an impression of real openness and level of disclosure. But actually it's delivered to an agenda that I'm not being disclosive, what I'm actually doing is playing a script and a mask

However, he was also clear that he was not fully aware of putting on this mask. Coach 5, in his individual interview, supported the unconscious nature of this:

Coach 5: I mean I felt it was just unconscious knowledge of the process that he could apply that additional input just naturally. I didn't feel that he was diverting part of his conscious effort because of the process piece, no. But I mean that's just the way I felt and I guess there's a level of skill of being a coach, isn't there? So Coachee 5's quite skilled I would say. So there'll be a degree of, you know, unconscious competence there that allows him to do that

In summary, at a surface level, there seems to be evidence of Coachee 5 seeking to honestly and openly raise a challenging issue about self worth. However, the impact of the ambivalent nature of what is offered has resulted in the coach focused on the evidence base for being confident as opposed to exploring issues of self worth and confidence and why they might be lacking. It is difficult to argue that the coachee is avoiding the issue completely but there does seem to be a shift towards the technical and tactical solutions to these feelings as opposed to going deeper into them.

#### *Example 2*

Like Coachee 5, Coachee 2 is, in this example, considering a move into a different career path; in this case starting her own business. Again there is a sense of being stuck with an issue and the coachee vacillating between wanting to take it forward and being cautious about making an error:

Coachee 2: It just kind of feels like that. But then I kind of just didn't... **don't really feel very confident in going forward with that idea.** It's like I think of all these ideas and I think, oh but **they'd be great for someone else almost and not me.** And I don't know what the kind of... there's definitely **a holding back there** of why it wouldn't be me, yeah. But I do think, oh this would be a great room to be creative in and sort of use some of my skills to be helping others in my position, you know, particularly first time mums. I'm really interested in, I guess, exactly where I am and seeing what others want to do. Because not everyone wants to do what I want to do. But they might... but I think there's a lot of women that want to get back in the workplace and don't know how.



Although the self doubt and reasons not to go ahead are there, Coach 2 does not engage with these and instead focuses on the business idea:

Coach 2: So creating space, not only for you but also for other women like yourself to be in.

This had the effect of moving the conversation onto the idea rather than the issues of self doubt and confidence. This approach of allowing the coachee to decide where the conversation will go is very much part of Coach 2's philosophy as she discusses with Coachee 2 and Paul in the paired interview:

Coach 2: 'Cause that is one of the things that I always want to create is a safe enough space for you to go where you need or want to go. So I think that I put feelers out to see whether you'd like to go somewhere. And then if you take it up, as it were... and I did put a big feeler out, and we just touched upon it and then we came away from it again. And I abs... I totally respect you that we'll go... you know that I do just trust that what happens is meant to happen, providing I'm, you know, just being kind of connected this way and that way and that.

Coach 2's actions in the coaching conversation seem consistent with this philosophy. However, the impact of this on the conversation is that the core issues of self worth and confidence do not get fully resolved, as at some level, it seems as though the coachee is reluctant to go there. In this example, the coach colludes with this diversion due to her belief that it is her role simply to "put feelers out" rather than to directly challenge the diversion. Also, she is keen to maintain the "connection" with Coachee 2 and is reluctant to risk damaging the relationship. Hence, the self-deprecating talk then leads onto a different aspect of the conversation, with the coach being diverted onto to examining the business idea.

#### *Example 3*

In this example, Coachee 7 is discussing her challenge around public speaking in meetings and events. There is again, a sense of ambivalence about the self judgment:

an acknowledgement of improvement alongside a sense of being stuck with the behaviour:

Coachee 7: Yeah. Yeah, 'cause it's not necessarily about the stage fright or the adrenaline or, it's the do people want to hear what I have to say? Which goes back to do people value me? Yeah, I'm sort of getting better with that. That was the pay rise stuff and things. So that's huge but it hasn't quite got to, and yes they want to have to say too, wow [laughs], which is where I would like it to be and feel that I can stand up on a stage or I can speak at a meeting and... I mean it's not always like this, Coach 7. You know, my Board, I always feel they want to hear what I have to say. I never feel this at the Board, but meetings at government level and where you've got to have some sharp elbows sometimes to get what you want said, when everybody else is trying to get their airtime.

Once again, however, although this is raised by the coachee, the coach addresses one part of the agenda i.e. airtime as opposed to the issues regarding self worth and assumptions about added value:

Coach 7: In my head there's something about just 'cause you don't take up as much airtime doesn't mean to say that you don't get heard. Sometimes people get heard more 'cause they don't take up airtime.

As in the case of coaching relationship 2, Coach 7's philosophy about challenge and picking up on these issues is pertinent here. Coach 7 uses the metaphor of dance to illustrate the point she is making, in her individual telephone interview. Paul asks her about the role of challenge in the coaching relationship, after a discussion about the importance of following a coachee where they want to go, in a coaching conversation:

Paul: Whereas following has notions of, you know, going with her. So I'm wondering what the place of challenge is in the relationship with Coachee 7. Do you see what I mean?

Coach 7: Yeah. And it's that togetherness that is... I don't quite know, as I say, if the dancing metaphor fits, but at some stage there is a point at which I'll say hang on a minute, that doesn't quite square with... Or I'll ask the question how does that relate to what you said previously? So there is a shift. So it isn't following in total. It's following in order to, yeah, make a movement maybe in a different direction. And that's where the challenge comes in. So we can't keep going backwards or forwards in whatever direction. In the dancing thing, there would be some maybe shift of hand position or something that said to the guy, if it was a man who was leading, there's something behind you or we need to do something a bit different. There is a point of challenge in there but if I feel that I follow or dance with in order too.

Here, the impact of the coachee raising a difficult issue is that Coach 7 chooses to pay attention to it at some points in the conversation but not in others. The coach in this example appears to have been diverted successfully onto a different aspect of the conversation.

#### *Reflection on Theme*

In each of these examples, the coachee engages in some level of self-deprecation about their skills, abilities and personal failings. However, what is noticeable about this is that the coaches do not really engage with these perceived personal failings. It is as if the conversation has been shut down as a result because the coach chooses not to pursue these conversational avenues.

My sense is that this sort of defensive process is the most subtly exercised and thus the hardest for both coach and coachee to deal with. The coach is getting signals from the coachee that they are being open, honest and disclosing deep routed personal feelings. Similarly, the coachee feels that they are not holding anything back. However, the substantive issues that seem to underpin thoughts and actions in these coaching sessions - i.e. self confidence, self worth, a sense of being stuck - do not always get fully attended to by the coaching pair. This has the effect of enabling the coachee to engage in the process of introspection but in a way that is not too challenging. Although this does not seem to be being consciously exercised by the coachees, there

does seem to be evidence of this playing out in the coaching sessions themselves. Nevertheless, this interpretation is open to challenge in that some of the coaches suggest that they are making active and conscious choices about where to go in the conversation, so the extent to which coachees agency is a factor could be questioned. The rationale put forward by some of the coaches is that they are following the agenda of the coachee and that they expect to return to those issues later on in the conversation. However, this did not appear to happen within the sessions that I observed. As some of the coaches speculated, this may have been because of my presence. This does support the interpretation, though, that coachees are protecting themselves (unconsciously) from me as well as from their coach, by diverting the conversation to safer ground.

Again, this resonates with my personal experience of helping relationships in that I have felt that I have offered and disclosed personal vulnerabilities about myself and the way that I operate, both in personal and professional relationships, but in ways that have suited me too. Although I do not see this as a deliberate and conscious strategy, it is nevertheless, in some senses, strategic, as it enables a deepening of the relationship via some disclosure but in a way that is safe and to some degree comfortable for the coachee.

#### Diversion - Use of Humour

Another device that coachees used in coaching sessions was the use of humour, often by making jokes at their own expense. This had the benefit of enhancing the rapport and relationship with the coach but also acting as a distraction or movement away from difficult or sensitive areas.

#### *Example 1*

In this example, Coachee 5 is exploring how he can experiment with different ways of engaging with people, moving away from his more typically cerebral style that he uses at work, towards one that is more centred on feelings and authenticity. The following

exchange illustrates how Coachee 5 uses humour in this context, to deal with a difficult and potentially sensitive issue:

Coach 5: Yeah. Would you be able to envisage different social work environments where you would be able to talk about yourself in that way?

Coachee 5: Yeah, I think so. Not work. You know, I've been with this organisation so long I know a lot of people, I don't think that that would be too stretching 'cause you already either know people well or carry an assumption about them and it wouldn't be a test. But I think socially, yeah. I was just thinking there, I was talking about the split with my wife, if I ever want to go back on the dating game and find somebody else to share my life with, that is absolutely going to be a crucial test of that. Get on Match.com and go on dates. Thanks!

Coach 5: Can I make a suggestion at this point? Gok Wan's programmes are really good [l o u g h s].

Coachee 5: Who?

Coach 5: Gok Wan. I'll tell you after [l a u g h s].

Coachee 5: Yeah, good. But actually, now, thinking about it, if I'm taking this now into a whole life context, whether that's about professional relationships but actually it's no different. Now think about that, becoming good at one makes you more comfortable in the other. So therefore is my first KPI success success managing to get on a date twice [laughs]. Yeah, great. I didn't expect to get to that!

What is noticeable here is that Coachee 5 skilfully frames the intervention as having helped him make a connection between one context and another. However, he

manages not to make any commitment at that juncture to do anything different either at work or at home. Despite the good humour in which the coaching session appears to have been conducted, Coachee 5, in his individual interview, makes it clear that he does not intend to follow up the relationship or conversation in a subsequent session as shown in the following exchange between Paul and Coachee 5, some weeks after the coaching session:

Paul: Right. So you don't think there'll be a next session, as it were?

Coachee 5: No, 'cause there hasn't been to date yet and I don't feel the need or the compulsion to take up one.

Paul: Right. That's interesting. So what's that about do you think?

Coachee 5: I don't know. Again, I think it comes, for me, speaking from a personal point of view, because it drove just a level of self-reflection and actually I'm being quite introvert, self-sufficient, actually started my own thinking journey. And therefore the need for external challenge once I'd kind of had that change in realisation, I guess change in responsibility for me that it had created, that's kind of the difference. And by the sense of responsibility I mean recognised that I might not have been as consistent with my styles, values and beliefs as I thought I was.

Paul: Okay. So you feel now that you're able to sort of internalise that in some way, that challenge?

Coachee 5: I feel like I have done around that issue, but that's not to say that I would accept there's nothing else that requires challenging. So maybe that's the point for raising it. That around the issues we talked on the day, yes I've internalised it but what I've lost is potentially the value of anything else that we didn't get into. Or the other assumptions that I'm now making perhaps.

In this case, whilst Coachee 5 seems to have enjoyed the sessions and engaged to some degree with Coach 5 on a personal level, he does not see value in continuing the

relationship. However, as indicated above, in response to Paul, he says he recognises the need for challenge.

#### *Example 2*

In the example below, Coachee 1 responds using humour after Coach 1 challenges her on the extent to which she gets support for herself in doing her management role.

Coach 1: How could you support yourself in a different way?

Coachee 1: I can say "no" more often [laughs]. Which is not something I'm good at, as you know.

Coach 1: And you laugh when you say that.

Coachee 1: I do laugh, because... I do laugh. Because last night, on the last night of my holiday, I spent about two hours writing a paper for work 'cause I didn't think I'd get a chance to do it on holiday, and my husband just said to me, what are you doing? I said I need to get this done. And I think I get kind of squeezed through the top and the bottom, 'cause there's a lot of expectations from the top, but I like that. I don't want to give that up, and then I get dragged into all the operational, you know, microscopic things.

Again, what is noticeable about this is that, whilst Coachee 1 does respond, she does not at that point address the issue of getting further support and hence manages to avoid answering the question at this juncture. It is only when Coach 1 persists that issues of asking for support from her boss are addressed. This seems convenient for Coachee 1 as she does not have to address the issue of admitting that she is struggling with some of the demands on her. However, in this case the diversion was unsuccessful due to the persistence of the coach.

*Example 3*

In this example, the coachee wanted to talk to the coach about developing her business in terms of its stated values and approach, with a view to marketing it more effectively to clients who want to purchase that service. As part of the conversation, the coachee refers to a business development opportunity that she has identified at a conference. The coach then decides to make an intervention on that basis:

Coach 6: We've just met on the 6th floor in the hotel where the conference is being held.

Coachee 6: You're going to ask me for my elevator pitch, aren't you? I know. I've done this to so many people. It's coming back at me now [laughs].

Coach 6: Well you've clearly thought about it.

Coachee 6: I haven't, no. I used to use this all the time with social entrepreneurs. So, okay, where are you now? So you're in the elevator and the doors shut and you've got one minute before they open again and you've got this really important person like huge funder or yeah, and then what are you going to say? Who are you?

It is noticeable here that the coachee seems to make light of the challenge from the coach, making herself the subject of the humour in terms of the challenge being just reward for her behaviour towards her own coachees in the past. However, in this case, the coach decides to persist with the exercise, even though the coachee is being playful in her response to his request and, in the end, the coachee engages with the scenario.



In each of these examples, the coachee uses humour quite naturally within the conversation and, in one sense, these interventions can be seen as just a natural part of a personal coaching relationship. It is also noticeable that that coach joins in and acknowledges the humour, for the most part. However, my sense is that humour is also used here as a mechanism for diverting attention away from the coachee's issues particularly when the coachee makes themselves the butt of the joke. This use of humour appears to be a functional strategy for coachees particularly if they feel vulnerable in terms of self worth. In each of the examples, and indeed, within a number of the paired and individual interviews, both participants used humour as a way of lightening the situation. This seemed to have the impact of temporarily diverting the conversation away from the deeper work within the conversation, which, in turn, enabled the coachee to continue within the conversation, as opposed to physically or psychologically withdrawing. This appears to have the dual benefit of offering the coachee some respite, as well as enhancing the warmth and connection of the coaching relationship.

In my own helping relationships, I have noticed myself using humour and self deprecation to avoid taking responsibility for action by diverting the helper's attention away from the issue. However, I often only notice this in retrospect and it can be easy to miss what then gets avoided as a result. Jokes and humour are particularly difficult to deal with in terms of diversion as they denote warmth and humanity. As a coach, I have learnt that rapport and chemistry are important in coaching. Therefore, when a coachee makes a joke or uses humour, I am inclined to see this as positive affirmation of the strength of the coaching relationship. As a result, I am at risk of being seduced into not challenging someone who I feel I have a strong rapport with.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I examined two domains of coachee skills - diversion and deflection. Within each of these there were different conversational strategies employed by the coachee - either consciously or unconsciously - that served to protect the coachee from difficulty or threat within the coaching conversation but, also, enabled them to keep in the relationship and in the conversation. These were often more subtle than the behaviours observed in the previous chapter but tended to have an impact on the coach and the extent to which they were able to challenge the coachee. I also experienced some of these conversational strategies being used towards me in my role as researcher and examined some of the examples from this perspective, also.

In the Conclusions Chapter, I will bring together both the findings from the Enabling Mechanisms Chapter and this one and combine these with the insights gained from exploring the literature. I will use the combination of fieldwork and theory to suggest an alternative discourse of coaching, using the insights generated.

# Conclusions Chapter

## Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I pull together the various findings that have come out my analysis of the fieldwork in the previous two chapters. I then integrate those findings with the themes identified in the literature review to identify the ways in which this work contributes to that literature and extends it. Essentially, I argue that the core contribution I am making is to the coaching discourse by offering an alternative discourse on coaching which includes the coachee and their skills within coaching. I articulate this contribution by putting forward a number of underpinning propositions about coaching that I have developed from the data analysis process. I articulate my contribution to knowledge and address the core research question. I present a revised framework for the coaching process which includes the alternate coachee discourse. Finally, I identify some of the limitations of the existing research, identify some implications for me as a practitioner and identify some avenues for future research.

## Discussion of Findings

Based on the findings in the preceding two chapters, I developed a map of my data structure which identifies enabling and defensive mechanisms in coaching conversations, shown overleaf:

Figure 5: Data Structure Revisited



This is included here to show how the agency of the coachee might be understood, bringing together both enabling and defensive processes. My process for developing the data structure is described in the data analysis section of the Research Methodology Chapter. However, I will now draw together the theoretical insights generated within the literature review, together with the insights from the data analysis process, by exploring the principle research questions that have driven the research process.

The data collection process was designed to address the following questions:

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches, which influences coaching?

- a. How do they use conversational devices and strategies?
- b. What impact do these have on coaching process?
- c. What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

As stated in the literature review and in the research methodology chapter, my approach to the research was a grounded approach, where the focus was on developing theory from the data. As a result, the review of the literature was guided by the emerging themes from the data, hence, resulting in an iterative process of moving between theory and data to arrive at the themes presented here. Therefore, the conversational strategies and devices on the far right of the map were induced from the data analysis process and then codified to give them meaning and connection with a theoretical underpinning.

In the data analysis chapters, I engaged with the data, firstly, in terms of the participants' perspectives and, after each theme, with my own interpretation of these themes that brought in my own experience in relation to those themes. I will follow the same convention here for several reasons. Firstly, as I have stated in the Research Methodology Chapter as well as in the Introductory Chapter, it is important to acknowledge my own part in the coaching world and its development. Hence, I need a mechanism that enables me to expose my own voice, role and interpretations so that any knowledge claims can be judged within that context. Secondly, as I have also stated, personal reflexivity was also an important aspect of the research design for me, given my various roles as helper and helpee. Finally, the process also mirrors that which I undertook in the findings chapters so offers continuity and consistency.

#### Conversational Devices and Strategies

When examining the coach-centric prevailing discourse in the coaching literature, practitioner writers identified a number of skills that coaches engaged with. For example, Downey (2014) identifies six sets of skills that coaches use: generating understanding/ raising awareness, proposing, managing self, structuring , building relationship, understanding organisational context, whilst Whitmore (2009) uses the GROW model of coaching (Goals, Reality, Actions, Will) to contain similar coaching

skills. Within each of these frameworks, there are specific conversational strategies that the coach can adopt e.g. repeating, paraphrasing, summarising. Viewing these interventions in the context of the data analysis, however, suggests that, without wishing to diminish the skilled activity of the coach, these coach skills represent only one side of these relationships. As the data analysis shows, coachees are often capable of protecting themselves - both consciously and unconsciously - in ways that can blunt the most effective coaching strategies. Furthermore, as was argued in the literature review chapter, it is possible to re-examine the examples given by coaching authors, offered to demonstrate coach competence, in a way that can also suggest coachee process skills. Coachee process input differs from coachee content input in terms of way that the former influences the way in which the conversation is conducted, whereas content input is the subject matter that the coachee brings to the coaching session. Whilst, as I have argued, there are some parts of the coaching literature that suggest coachee process skills, there is no research that has focused on this aspect of coaching. Hence, my work extends coaching processes to include those of the coachee.

As argued in the literature review, a number of writers focus on the importance of goal clarity but they attribute the ability to set clear goals as being a function of the coach's skill. Coachees are often construed as needing help in attaining that focus, within the literature. However, in this study, all coachees had some measure of clarity about what they wanted from the coaching conversation (as well as what they did not want). The coaches' questioning of the goals and the outcomes that the coachees wanted was useful. It seemed to enable the coachees to engage in an iterative process of becoming clearer about what they wanted, that was more retrospective in nature, in the sense that they were able to reflect back on their goals and purposes and understand them in a different way. As Coachee 1 argued, in her individual interview, "I think sometimes when you say things out loud, you know they're not as bad as you thought, or you have to reframe them because they don't really make any sense". The process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) on the part of the coachee often took the form of the coachee seeking to summarise what was emerging for them from the conversation and hearing themselves articulate it. This emergent sense making could also be seen as coachees engaging with acts of meaning (Bruner, 1990) through their engagement and re-engagement with their own narrative, through the recounting of it to their coach.

Writers on coaching seem to privilege coaches' skills in coaching but, in some senses, their perspective is borne out in this study. Coaches **are** skilled and they do make a difference to coachees and coaching. My analysis of these coaching conversations and interviews, however, suggests that the coach and coachee co-create a context whereby the coachee has access to their own narrative and discourse, using the coach and the coaching conversation as the conduit for this. This co-creation in terms of process (not just outcome) is something that is muted within the literature. Whilst there is clear evidence that the coach can certainly influence the direction and flow of these conversations, using their process skills and inputs, the coachee can do so also. For example, both Coachee 4 and Coachee 7 were introduced to using creative methods of musical instruments (Coachee 4) and buttons (Coachee 7) by their coaches. However, as Drake (in Cox et al 2014) argues, in relation to narrative coaching, it is possible to engage in 're-storying', where the individual coachee regains control of their own discourse around their mindset, behaviour and context.

Coachees 4 and 7, in particular, have used the opportunity of engaging with these methods as metaphors to proactively engage with their own autobiographies and operate more as authors of their own experiences as opposed to passive recipients of false dialogues (Nielsen and Norreklit, 2009) which seek to perpetuate others' agendas (Rose, 1999). As Morgan (2006) has argued, having an awareness of the assumptions and theories that drive our practice can be useful in emancipating individuals from dominant forms of control, particularly where they are subtly influential (Lukes, 2005). Hence, whilst the ability to frame a conversation, and influence it, is important, it is perhaps even more important to be able to re-frame and re-script.

Reissner and Du Toit (2011) have suggested that coachees do actively do this as part of 'storyselling' in organisations, whilst Rettinger's (2011) discourse analysis of coaching conversations argues that, in some cases, the coachee is conceived of as being the expert, which challenges the dominance of the coach centric discourse. Louis and Dichon's (2014) account of discourses in coaching suggested at least 3 mechanisms by which coachees seek to emancipate themselves from the prevailing discourse of organisation control and exercise their own agency. My analysis in this study has revealed that coachees can use several conversational devices to control the direction, depth and scope of the coaching conversation. For example, by seeking to

distance themselves from conversational content by deflecting the coach's attention away from difficult areas, the coachee successfully protects themselves from the pain of embarrassment or threat.

This was particularly the case with Coachees 3 and 6 in the study. However, this racketeering (Lapworth and Sills, 2011) is often done unconsciously and, as can be seen from the field work, coachees can be in denial as they cover up for this and furthermore can also deny that they have covered up - this has been referred to as "fancy footwork" (Argyris and Schon, 1996).

Whilst this approach - conscious or not - can be seen as negative or defensive, it has the benefit of enabling the coachee to defend themselves from conversational strategies enacted by or through the coach, that might be construed as controlling in nature. The challenge that the coach can face is that, despite their attempt to help the coachee achieve what Jung referred to as individuation (Stevens, 1994), attempts to challenge the coachee may be perceived as attacks on the autonomous self (Rose, 1999). Hence, coachees use several conversational strategies to resist these 'attacks' via either distancing language (use of language outside self or abstraction) or self judgement (use of humour or self deprecation) to maintain their equanimity and defend what Hayes et al, (2012) have referred to as the conceptualised self.

#### *Reflections on Theme*

My experience of coaching and being coached suggests that privileging coach skills and downplaying coachee skills does not describe the territory of coaching. As a coachee and indeed a supervisee and client within therapy, I can choose what to disclose, what to work on and what I choose to avoid addressing.

In engaging with this study, the patterns of coachee behaviour that I can recognise in myself as coachee are the ways in which I can influence coaching and supervisory processes to go towards areas that I am comfortable with. In some ways, these are conducive towards the depth and speed of the helping process as I am familiar with operating in adult mode (Lapworth and Sills, 2011) as a helpee and can therefore engage with framing and reframing my thinking. Furthermore, given my familiarity with the field of coaching after working in the area for the last 15 years, I am



accustomed to the terms and language that is used. However, I am less aware of how I might be resisting and influencing the coaching conversation in directions that I am less comfortable with.

Humour is something I tend to engage with regularly as both a coach and a coachee. Reflecting on the findings regarding diversion, I recognise that on some occasions I have both made jokes and explicitly questioned my own ability in relation to thinking about, for example, my future and how I would like to engage with it. At the time, I believed that I was operating in an open and unguarded way but, on reflection, by claiming "I struggle to think about the future", I do not give the coach/ helper any conversational route to address this, influencing them to change tack. As Lukes (2005: 53) has argued, "inaction need not be a featureless non-event". In other words, not offering something is often as powerful, perhaps more so, than active resistance. The impact of these conversational strategies is discussed in the next section.

#### Impact on Coaching Process

The coaching process, as argued in the literature review, is conceived of as being principally the preserve of the coach. The focus of that literature is on how coaches can and should influence the coaching process, albeit in the service of the coachee. Hence, the literature provides little support or indication that coachees have a role to play in the coaching process. However, what my data analysis indicates is that the exercise of conversational strategies as examined in the data analysis chapter has a significant impact on the depth and the pace of the coaching intervention. For example, by engaging with and using metaphors, all of the coachees offer their coaches a mechanism by which they can engage with the coachee and build the relationship.

For example, Coachee 2 uses the metaphor of her house being like her body which then enables Coach 2 to gently prompt and probe that metaphor, moving between the figurative and literal meanings that Coachee 2 attaches to 'working on the house'. Similarly, by demonstrating an understanding and familiarity with the language of personal development in general and in coaching in particular, all of the coachees in the study were able to facilitate the coaching conversation so as to address core issues that they needed to work.

Set against that, as suggested by the work of Bowlby (1988), Casement (1985, 1990) and Lapworth and Sills (2011), is the notion that coachees also have the capacity to avoid such areas as they find difficult to deal with, even if they have themselves chosen to introduce such issues. Examining the data, there are several examples where the coachee appears to be open and genuine with their coach but, nevertheless, managing to influence the coach's focus of attention. For example, Coachee 5 gives Coach 5 a number of indications that he found the session illuminating and useful but two things are noticeable: he does not commit to doing anything significantly different from before and, following the session, chooses not to re-engage with the coach.

In this sense, this response resonates with the work of Louis and Diochon (2014) when they examine the notion of the apparent accomplice coachee strategy in their fieldwork. However, my data analysis seems to extend their notion to include the collusion of the coach in this process, albeit at a unconscious level, so that the coach believes that they have sufficiently challenged the coachee and helped to develop their thinking but, without invoking any significant behavioural change on the part of the coachee. It is only after analysing the paired interviews and individual interviews that some of this collusion comes to light. However, it would be a mistake to assume that this is a conscious exercise in power.

As Stevens (1994) and Douglas (2008) have argued, in relation to the therapeutic work of Jung, it is often the case that the patient's unconscious impacts on the therapist. Furthermore, as Lukes (2005) has argued in relation to power, impact can be experienced as much in terms of inaction (in the form of passive resistance). Nevertheless, the impact of these conversational devices and strategies can be to close down potential avenues of challenge and exploration.

On the other hand, coachees also demonstrated the capacity to recognise and acknowledge their own motivations and drivers for doing things. For example, Coachee 2 acknowledges her impatience with her husband for not being ready to move forward with their plans, Coachee 3 recognises her own avoidance patterns with respect to engaging in training and Coachee 5 acknowledges the impact that he can have on others by appearing too rational and unfeeling. The impact of surfacing and naming some difficult feelings means that the coach is helped in identifying core motivation

and drives of the coachee which can then be engaged with by both coach and coachee to effect behavioural change. The importance of this contact with one's own sensations and motivations is one of the cornerstones of Gestalt coaching (Bluckert, 2006) where this awareness is critical in moving through the cycle of experience.

As many writers in the field (de Haan, 2008 in particular) have argued, the degree of trust in the relationship between the coach and the coachee is critical as to whether the coachee engages positively with the coaching processes and uses these conversational devices and processes to extend and deepen the coaching conversation or whether they instead defend against coach interventions - both consciously and unconsciously- to protect themselves from undue embarrassment or threat.

One particular defensive process that emerged from the data, however, which could both add to the warmth of the relationship in one sense but limit it in another sense is the use of humour. For instance, Coachee 5 and Coach 5 engage in a joke together about seeing Coachee 5 as Mr Spock who always gives "the logical answer". Whilst, on the one hand, seems to add warmth and connection to the relationship, also means that it is then more difficult for the coach to challenge that process as the coachee is owning up to that personal foible. This seems to be because that, by coming across as open, self critical and reflective, the coachee appears to be engaging in what Western (2012) refers to as depth work, where the coachee is exposing what is going on 'beneath the surface'.

This seems to happen for Coachee 3 when discussing her resistance to training, Coachee 6 when discussing her resistance to selling her coaching services, Coachee 4 when discussing her prior commitments to coaching homework and Coachee 1 when discussing her working whilst on holiday.

By engaging in acts of self deprecating humour, which seem to espouse an honest and open demeanour, the coachee can be argued to be preventing themselves from any commitment to change by rendering such behaviours as personal weaknesses which are not amenable to change or challenge. The coachee seems, in essence, to be saying 'this is me - I can't change'.

What this reveals is that the impact of coachee conversational strategies can at times be subtle and difficult to unpack. Hence, Bluckert's (2006) typology of 'coachability' may not stand up to this scrutiny, as his account of who might be characterised as excellent coaching material and those who are poor seems to rest mainly on whether they are behaviourally difficult/ unresponsive or not, whereas my data suggests that coachees can be more skilled and sophisticated in their resistance than Bluckert's (2006) typology would suggest.

#### *Reflections on Theme*

It seems to me as though the impact of these conversational devices and routes have two possible impacts. The coach either is influenced or colludes with the coachee in terms of the way the conversation progresses or the coach recognises the influence that is occurring and takes steps to challenge this. This latter route (challenge) can be seen in Coach 1's challenge to Coachee 1 in terms of her use of language outside self or with Coach 6 in terms of his elevator pitch challenge to Coachee 6. However, there was also a pressure on the coach to take action in terms of this challenge which for some resulted in an element of performance anxiety. As discussed in the research methods chapter, this was, to some extent, a function of me being present as an observer. However, this could also, arguably, be due to the prevailing discourse of the coaching world having an impact. The coach is perceived, as has been argued already, as the skilled protagonist in the coaching dyad, whereas the coachee has often been portrayed as the passive recipient of the coach's interventions. Reframing this, however, suggests that the coach is principally responsible for and thus should take credit for any progress - or lack of it - that the coachee makes. Perhaps this is why those who write about their own coaching experiences (eg Blattner, 2005) tend to promote the seniority and achievements of their coachees. However, my analysis suggests that the impact of the coachees' skills are equally significant in terms of the attainment of the coachee as a result of the coaching process.

In terms of the impact on me, I noticed that as part of the data collection process, I was often influenced by the coachee and the coach in the interviews in terms of conversational arenas and areas that they were comfortable to engage in. For instance, when challenging Coachee 1 about the impact of her use of language out of

self, I accepted her explanation as part of the interview and did not progress the challenge any further. However, it was only when analysing the data and reflecting on this impact of it that I become fully conscious of this. The skilful activity engaged in by the coachees is examined, in terms of skills, is examined in this next section.

## Coachee Skills

By looking at the categories generated from my analysis of the data, it is possible to generate a heuristic which illustrates a number of domains of skilled activity on the part of the coachee, that are similar to those for the coach as articulated by, for example, Downey (2014), Starr (2008), Whitmore (2009). These are summarised below:

*Framing the Conversation* - being able to set the path and scope of a coaching conversation and to iteratively develop where the conversation is going as it progresses

*Understanding Coaching Processes* - being able to be open to, and engage with different coaching techniques and processes and having awareness and understanding of key personal development terms and their implications

*Reframing Thinking* - the ability to change the way an issue or challenge is conceptualised using experimentation and practising different conversations, engaging with different metaphors and being aware and engaged with own values and emotions

*Deflection* - the ability to distance oneself from difficult topics, feelings or emotion by use of language outside self or engaging with concepts in an intellectualised, abstract way.

*Diversions* - the ability to use humour and self deprecation to shut down or change conversational routes that involve consideration of difficult behavioural change

This framework extends the current notion of coachee skills beyond that of coachability (Bluckert, 2006) and recognises that coachees both help and hinder the progress of the coaching relationship, rather than simply on more general technical skills involved in being a good learner (Carroll and Gilbert, 2008). However, as I have

argued in relation to coach skills, an over-emphasis on coachee skills is susceptible to the same critique of only representing one side of the coaching relationship. Hence, it is important to understand how the skills of the coachee might complement those of the coach. I examine this below, using the above coachee skill domains as the starting place for this.

#### *Framing The Conversation*

By being able to clarify what they want from a coaching session in terms of goal, purpose or ultimate outcome, the coachee is able to engage with the coach's process questions in an effective way. For example, Whitmore (2009) argues that the coach should establish different sorts of goals within a coaching session: end goals, performance goals, goals for the session and interim goals. However, David, Clutterbuck and Megginson (2013) argue that, whilst goals can be useful, it is important for coaches to work with them in a sensitive and nuanced way, which accounts for the coachee's perspective. By being able to articulate nuanced goals, the coachee influences the pace and efficacy of the process and determines their own goals, with the coach prompting the coachee to articulate them. This also (see Reframing) means that the coachee needs to be in touch with what it is important to them and be able to recognise and articulate it.

#### *Understanding the Coaching Process*

By being able to understand the underpinning philosophies, models and purposes of coaching, the coachee can engage with the language and concepts within coaching, and, crucially, remain open and engaged with the different interventions that the coach wishes to try. This has the benefit of enabling the coach to experiment with a repertoire of behaviours and experiments to seek to help the coachee resolve issues and dilemmas. For example, Berg and Szabo (2005) use the miracle question as part of their solutions focus methodology in order to invite coachees to set aside practical challenges and difficulties and be pulled towards a compelling vision of the future. By understanding the coaching process and language, the coachee can manage their own

resistance and emotions to this challenge and remain open to imagining an alternative future. This again works in the same direction as the coach wants to work as it moves the conversation towards deep seated motivations, wants and desires which the coach can facilitate the coachees' engagement with. Of course, when this is too challenging (see Diversion and Deflection) the coachee may seek to resist these invitations but the understanding of the process may ensure that coachee remains open to such possibilities and challenges.

#### *Reframing Thinking*

Reframing thinking involves the coachee having the skills to recognise and challenge their own thinking. The coach plays a critical role here in terms of introducing that challenge and identifying inconsistencies and gaps in the coachee's thinking - for example, Downey (2014) refers to this skill set of the coach as proposing, which includes the notion of challenge. This might include identifying contradictions in the coachees thinking. Nevertheless, the coachee needs to have the capacity to (a) recognise and own these challenges and contradictions and (b) be able to reframe in order to achieve different outcomes. Using conversational devices like metaphors is a useful way of working collaboratively as a partnership on the coachee's issue. The coach helps the coachee to recognise the dominant metaphor and can offer ways of breaking away from typical ways of thinking - Western (2012) uses the term 'looking awry' at situations to achieve this reframing - but the coachee must then have the emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) to recognise what is important to them and works as a driver for their behaviour. Furthermore, by following the coachees interest (Downey, 2014), the coach can help the coachee engaging in sensemaking in the moment - Schon (1995) refers to this as reflection in action. The coachee's skills in terms of developing the scenario and being an expert in their own issues (Rettinger, 2011) can be seen to act as an important complement to these skills.

#### *Deflection*

Deflection involves the coachee distancing themselves from the subject matter under discussion, if this becomes more challenging, difficult or threatening. In this study, this often occurred at an unconscious level. Coaches tend to follow the interest of the coachee (Downey 2014) and engage in what Kimsey-House et al (2011) refer to as

"dancing in the moment", where the coach responds to what is happening in the moment with the coachee because this fits with the dominant philosophies in most coaching models (Cox et al, 2014; Passmore et al, 2013). As argued above, there are benefits and drawbacks in the coaching pair pursuing this approach. On the one hand, the coach might consciously choose to allow the coachee to deflect the conversation onto less personal territory, rather as Coach 2 does in the study, but they may also choose to challenge the deflection as Coach 1, 3 and 6 do with their coachees. In this case, the coach needs to balance the importance of the relationship being nurtured, against the importance of challenging the coachee and seeking to move the conversation to areas that they are less comfortable with, but which enable important agendas about personal development and growth to be attended to. As my data analysis has shown (like Diversion below), coachee deflection can be subtle and the coach needs to be skilled in picking up cues from the coachee's language and demeanour.

*D i v e r s i o n*

Diversion involves the coachee seeking, either consciously or unconscious, to divert or distract the coach away from certain areas of conversation. Like deflection, this often occurred at an unconscious level, with the coachee either choosing to self-deprecate in terms of their own failings/ drawbacks or make jokes about them. The coach, in a similar fashion to diversion can be aware of the attempt to divert and persist with the challenge as Coach 6 does or can choose to engage with the joke as Coaches 4 and 5 do. In using humour, it can be difficult for the coach to resist engaging with this, as it seems to be a way of engendering trust, friendship and liking into the relationship (de Haan, 2008).

The table below summarises the key differences between the prevailing discourse in the literature and the contribution that the data analysis makes:

Table 4: Comparison of Discourse and Data Analysis



**Prevailing Discourse In Literature**

Coach's methodology tends to drive process

Coachee mainly provides content and issues

Coachee skills more often seen as output from coaching as opposed to an input

Coachee can deliberately resist coach at times both consciously and unconsciously, which is often construed as having a negative impact on the coaching relationship

**Data Analysis**

Coachee influences and sometimes drives methodology

Coachee provides content and issues and enables process

Coachee uses process skills of understanding coaching process, framing the conversation and reframing thinking as inputs to deepen and enable coaching process

Coachee can consciously and unconsciously resist the coach by deflecting and engaging in self judgement which militate against depth and speed in the coaching process, but which keep the coachee in the process

*Reflection on Theme*

The notion of skilled activity in coaching has been challenged by this research, in two ways. Firstly, as I have argued extensively above, coaching skills are not just the preserve of the coach but coachee skills also have a significant role to play.

Secondly, it is important to recognise that not all conversational devices and actions in a coaching conversation are consciously generated by the participant. For me, skilled behaviour occurs at both a conscious and unconscious level. At a conscious level, I have recognised that coachee skills can be employed to complement those of the coach so that, as part of a collaborative alliance between coach and coachee (De Haan, 2008). For example, I have seen in my own practice as a coach where my skills in the use of incisive questions (Kline, 1999) can be combined with my coachee's understanding of the coaching process to enable a deeper and speedier engagement with the coachee's core issues or the coach's skill of following interest (Downey, 2014)

combined with the coachee's ability to frame the conversation by selecting the appropriate path they want the discussion to proceed down.

As a coach, I recognise that my interventions are only as effective as the coachee will allow me to be. As indicated by Nelson-Jones (2002) in skilled client model, the coachee can significantly support the coach's interventions by their level of engagement with the process being used and sharing information with the coach. At a less conscious level, coachees help coaches to work with them by sharing metaphors which can offer an effective route into understanding and reframing the coachees' experiences (Morgan, 2006). On the other hand, coachees, as demonstrated in the field work, can also unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, constrain and restrict the coaching process. They can divert the coach's attention away from difficult areas deliberately eg Coachee 6 diverting Coach 6 away from discussing her own personal development journey (outside the coaching) or deflect the coach away by engaging in more abstract, depersonalised discussions, less consciously.

Johnson (1993) argues, from a Jungian analyst's perspective, for the importance of balance in the psyche. Following Jung's work, he discusses the concept of the shadow as part of the human psyche - the parts of ourselves as human beings that we find unacceptable and seek to suppress. Johnson (1993) argues that 'talking therapies' - and it could be argued that coaching is one - provide a way of reconciling the shadow side. By providing a thinking environment (Kline, 1999) whereby coachees can express - consciously or otherwise - their shadow side eg negative thoughts, anger, resistance, denial - coaches are enabling their coachees to find balance. Johnson (1993) argues that, unless these things are given expression, they are likely to be projected onto someone else, who might indeed pick up these ideas:

"Unless we do conscious work on it, the shadow is almost always projected; that is, it is neatly laid on someone or something else so we do not have to take responsibility for it" (Johnson, 1993: 31)

The challenge, both for the coach and the coachee, is that, unconsciously, they might each seek to project parts of themselves that they find unacceptable onto the other party. Hence, there is the possibility of the relationship being ruptured if each is not aware of these challenges. The coachee skills of diversion and deflection can be seen

as ways of staying in the conversation and the relationship and of each not responding to any shadow projection from the coach or from themselves on to the coach. The coach is also susceptible to this and may unconsciously seek to project aspects of themselves that they find unacceptable on the coachee. Therefore, the coaching context provides a space whereby both parties skilfully interact with each other as part of a collaborative partnership. My own personal experience of coaching and of being coached supports this view that the coaching relationship is characterised by two complementary sets of skills which, following Johnson (1993) can serve to bring the relationship into equilibrium, rather than being dominated by one party over another. This is shown diagrammatically on Figure 6

Figure 6: Coach and Coachee Contributions to Coaching

## Coach

- Process skills
- Coaching Framework
- Experience of coaching

## Coachee

- Process Skills
- Unconscious processes
- Content
- Expertise in own life

Each part of the dyad brings with them process skills which enable them to work with the other. The coach additionally brings with them a methodology/ framework which sets the context for the conversations as well as their existing experience of coaching others. The coachee additionally brings with them the content issues that they wish to work on as well as their in depth lived experience which, in that sense makes them expert in their own life. In that sense the coachee has agency in terms of the process and the content. This will be explored further in the next section where I examine some of the implications of these answers for coaching.

### Implications

Now that I have answered the principal research questions, I will examine the broader implications of these findings for the coaching profession, in terms of the prevailing discourse that exists. I will do this by considering what the implications are for the difference audiences involved within coaching.

### *Coachee Agency*

As argued in the literature review, the concept of coachee agency in terms of coaching process is a notion that is significantly underdeveloped in coaching. One issue that has been raised in the therapy literature is that the notion of agency entailing a deliberate and active choice on the part of the coachee. The data analysis suggested that, for the coaching pairs in the study, there were, certainly, aspects of coachee behaviour that

were deliberate and conscious. For example, all of the coachees had some experience and understanding of coaching and thus were able to draw on this in terms of clearly stating and engaging in their goals and aspirations for the session and the coaching relationship (Framing).

In terms of the coaching literature, this positive and clear articulation of what they want has closer connection with what Western (2012) refers to as the celebrated self — the discourse within the coaching literature that focuses on personal growth and development - what Jung (Stevens, 1994) refers to as individuation.

The coachees in the study also chose to engage with the coaches, in the way that they wanted, by specifying the way in which they wished to engage with the coach. For example, Coachee 1 said that she wanted Coach 1 to challenge her, Coachee 3 wanted a "fresh pair of eyes" on her issues and Coachee 6 wanted to think a bit more deeply about her value proposition for her business. They also each recognised, following Bozer et al (2013) and Audet and Couteret (2012), the importance of being open to the process of coaching and being willing, where possible, to work with the coach's process. Whilst this is often construed as an attribute, rather than a skill or competence, I argue here that active engagement with the coach's process as a way of furthering their own agenda, is an active choice rather than, as is sometimes implied, process passivity on the part of the coachee (Kimsey-House et al, 2011). This extends and challenges the current notion of the coachee from one of simply being an effective learner to that of an active participant in the coaching process. Furthermore, as Carroll and Gilbert (2008) argue, the understanding of principles and processes of coaching in terms of the language and concepts that underpin it, can often speed up the process in terms of coachee engagement with it and enable a quicker way in to dealing with substantive issues.

All coaches, in their individual interviews, made reference to the ability and understanding of their coachee in terms of their understanding of the process of coaching as an enabler. A typical response was from Coach 7 who referred to Coachee 7 as being what she called one of her "blue touch paper people" who you can just stand back and let them run with the process following some gentle nudging and probing.

Whilst not always fully conscious in terms of engagement, coachee agency was also present in the way that the coachees tended to engage in challenging and working with their own thinking (Reframing). This view of the skilled or resourceful coachee/client, as argued in the literature review, is present in both therapy and coaching literatures but is often seen as the output to the coaching process, where the helpee is able to maintain any behavioural or cognitive changes they make as part of the helping process, going forward, after the intervention has finished. Little account is taken of the coachee's ability to offer and engage with their own metaphor; as argued previously, this is seen, almost exclusively, as a product of the coach's skill. Whilst I do not wish to diminish the coach's skill in helping the coachee to engage with their metaphors, the coachee's skill in being able to conceptualise a complex range of factors and issues into a coherent image or metaphor seems to be critical. This extends Nelson-Jones's (2002) perspective on the skilled client to recognise that, rather than seeing the client as implicitly being in deficit in terms of process skills, that they may already possess useful helping skills that can actually drive the coachee's agenda forwards in this way. This has theoretical implications for a number of different audiences within coaching. Firstly, it suggests that practitioner writers in coaching need to re-evaluate the lack of emphasis they put on coachee process skills and begin to integrate coachee skills into their models and frameworks. In practical terms, they might do this by articulating ways in which those being coached might seek to develop and enhance coachee skills. Secondly, for coaches themselves, it suggests that paying attention to the ability of their coachees to generate and reframe using metaphors may be an effective intervention in itself as a coaching process. As shown by my data analysis, some coaches are already doing so by their engagement with creative methods. However, as indicated by my review of the coaching literature, approaches that draw explicitly on the coachees' creativity such as narrative coaching (eg Drake in Cox et al 2014) still tend to emphasise the coach's skills in, for example, setting the narrative frame and say little about what coachees might be able to offer in terms of the process. Perhaps this shift may require the coach to deliberately relinquish some of the control of the coaching process to the coachee - I will address this issue of control and power in more depth in the next section. However, for coachees themselves the converse may be true - they need to acknowledge that they already have process skills in this area and that they have a responsibility for their own learning in terms of

engaging with these. Although psychotherapy is not the focus for this research, those engaged in delivering therapy to client may also benefit from recognising client reframing skills in their own work and how they might seek to cultivate that.

The data analysis also suggests that all of the coachees in the study have, to varying degrees, the ability to articulate and engage with their own self-talk in terms of the process, stating what is important to them at different junctures of the coaching conversations and demonstrating their propensity to use coaching conversations to mentally rehearse and experiment with different possibilities with their coach. Again, my intent is not to suggest that the coach has no role to play in this but, rather, to recognise that, in order for a non-directive, coachee centric approach to be effective, there must be some skilled activity required on the part of the coachee. In fact, in Kline's (1999) approach, this is, arguably the cornerstone of the thinking environment methodology. Whilst she does argue for coach intervention at various points in the process, Kline's (1999) principle and primary intervention is one of giving the coachee active attention so that they can think effectively. However, what Kline (1999) does not fully articulate and specify are the skills involved for the coachee in doing this. For example, asking the question of the coachee (Kline, 1999:148) such as "What are you assuming that is stopping you achieving your goal?" involves the coachee fully understanding and being aware of their own assumptions and then being able to articulate them. My analysis of the data suggests that coachees can do this, without the coach necessarily asking this sort of question but that it is a skilled activity and one which then sets the agenda for the session as opposed to the coach doing this. By practising and rehearsing possible conversations with significant others in the coachee's life, stating and re-stating what is important and creating and re-engaging with their own metaphors, the coachee influences the process and direction of the coaching conversation and the relationship with the coachee. Whilst this is clearly not only due to the coachee, the ability to reframe is an important coachee process skill.

However, set against these conscious and unconscious coachee interventions, the data analysis also revealed the ways in which coachees can influence the coaching process in ways that they are not conscious of, but that, nevertheless are significant in terms of coachee agency. As argued above, it is possible to see coachee resistance in a negative light and portray such resistance as lack of skill, seeing this as a deficit in the

coachee. In contrast, though, it is also possible to see these behaviours as being skilful interventions (albeit unconscious) on the part of the coachee to retain their control of the process and to enable them to stay in the conversation and the relationship with a degree of comfort. For example, diversion in terms of engaging in an abstract debates about differences between training and facilitation (Coach and Coachee 3) can be functional in that it allows the coachee time away from confronting their unconscious (Douglas, 2008) and enables building of the relationship between coach and coachee by perpetuating the dialogue (De Haan, 2008). As Louis and Diochon's (2014) fieldwork shows, the absence of this trusting relationship can lead to the coachee psychologically withdrawing from the relationship. Colley's (2003) study of agency in mentoring supports this, where the young mentees in the study tended to withdraw from their mentors when they perceived that the governmental agenda of employability was being asserted which, for some, sat at odds with their own agenda in terms of what they wanted to get from their relationship with their mentor. Again, this resistance appears to manifest itself in terms of mentees appearing to distance themselves from the mentors and deny any depth or substance to the relationship in some cases. As discussed above, Coachee 5's experience of coaching appears to fall into this category with Coachee 5 asserting that he felt that he no longer needed Coach 5 as he had recognised the issues for himself and could 'take it from there' himself.

#### *Reflections on Theme*

This research challenges the view that the coachee is the passive recipient of the coach's methodology. Whilst, as argued above, the coach may propose the methodology or framework used, the coachee has an equal part in enacting it. In my experience, coachees can come to coaching for a number of reasons: to confirm what they already thought, to get challenge on their perspective, to demonstrate their willingness to progress and be developed. As part of leadership development programmes, I have coached people who profess to be engaged in the process but are often using their presence on a leadership development programme as a way of demonstrating their fitness for promotion. As a result, they engage with coaching in a surface manner, using deflection and diversion to work on issues that they are comfortable with and which do not constitute any risk to themselves or their position within their organisations. Their principal agenda is one of apparent compliance (Louis



and Diochon, 2014) but they often contrive to divert the coaching issue presented away from deeply personal and substantive issues to ones that they are comfortable in dealing with in this forum. This defensive behaviour can be operating at an unconscious level, compounded by the fact that the coachees have little direct experience of coaching, thus do not have the benefit of understanding the coaching process. There is also a lack of willingness to engage in what they see as politically risky behaviour by disclosing personal views and feelings about where they work and who they work with. Therefore, whilst there is significant evidence of coachee skill and agency being displayed, there is also evidence of these coachees not really reframing their thinking due to their unwillingness to state what is really important to them and being prepared to have thinking challenged by someone else.

#### Manifestations of Power

In some ways, this entire study can be seen as an exercise in examining power. I have argued that there is a prevailing discourse that exists in the coaching world, which seems to privilege the coach's skills and interventions and downplay those of the coachee. Further than that, however, I have argued that, in some cases - even when the explicit focus of the coaching is on coachee strengths eg Kimsey-House et al (2011), Downey (2014) - the coachee can be portrayed as lacking in insight, self-awareness and focus.

Following Garvey (2011), I contend that this is to some extent a power play on the part of those involved in coaching. It suits key players and practitioners in coaching to portray the coachee as a weak, to some extent, needy recipient of the coach's wisdom. This is because these needy clients then need to pay a process expert to help resolve the coachee's issues and thus creates a market and a livelihood for these actors. However, the data analysis reveals that this conception of the coachee as being only able to influence the content of the coaching conversation is flawed. As argued above, coachees have demonstrated that they are able to significantly influence the discourse of the coaching, not only in terms of the coaching itself but have sought (albeit unconsciously) to influence my own interventions as researcher in the interviews following the coaching, as argued in the analysis chapters.

As Rose (1999), Sennett (1998), Bruner (1990) and Giddens (1991) have argued, the concept of the self is heavily influenced by the social pressures targeted upon it. It can be argued that, via the interventions of professional bodies, through their codes of practice and other publications, coachees are indirectly influenced in terms of their expectations about who is deemed to be expert and who is not within the coaching relationship. Also, it should not be ignored that coaches themselves have a vested interest in portraying themselves as experienced experts due to the fact that one is often providing a paid service to the other. This expertise is portrayed in rational terms (Townley, 2008) to justify coach fees and status. Rose (1999) asserts that such experts play a critical role within work and society. This is because they provide processes which enable links between a governmental agenda regarding generating productive citizens with society and organisational agendas about generating productive workers. These processes are directed at the individual via professional expertise as applied within the workplace:

"Experts on work play a crucial role in linking together these distinct concerns into a functioning network. In doing so they come to have a key role, constructing a language and set of techniques, simultaneously based upon an esoteric scientific knowledge they possess, realised through detailed technical prescriptions and devices they can construct and operate, and consonant with national economic health, increased organisational effectiveness, and progressive and humanistic values" (Rose, 1999:119)

If this view of professional expertise is applied to coaches, then the distinct sets of language, techniques and processes that characterise coaching can be seen as ways of realising a more compliant and productive individual but using the rhetoric of self development and the celebrated self (Western, 2012) to achieve it. However, the data analysis suggests that the efficacy of the coaching intervention is much more to do with partnership and collaboration in terms of process that the prevailing discourse within coaching would suggest. Whilst there is clearly scope for disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) to be exercised and directed towards the self as coachee via the person of the coach and their methodology, there is also scope for collaboration and collusion within the dyad which would militate against what Nielsen and Norreklit

(2009) have referred to as a space dominated by the organisation. This collaboration is shown in the way that, in all of the conversations, there is a shared language of personal development which is accessed by both coach and coachee, rather than simply by the coach, in order to demonstrate their professionalism; for example, Coachee 2 uses the language of repression, Coachee 4 talks about "existential angst" and Coachee 1 talks about parallel process. Furthermore, by seeking to reframe their thinking within the coaching sessions, the coachees in this study also show that are capable of personal reflexivity. In this sense, these findings provide a process response to Rose's (1999) call for a challenge to the idea of the fabricated self in favour of one that is truly autonomous. By recognising and engaging with their own emotions and values within the coaching process, the coachees in the study have, to some extent, at least sought to emancipate themselves from defending what Hayes et al (2012) call the conceptualised self. This connects with Dey and Steyaert's (2014) work in social entrepreneurship where the entrepreneurs in the study were able to emancipate themselves from the prevailing discourse from government agencies and retain their sense of identity and autonomy. Therefore, we can reframe a coaching conversation as a space within which coachees can seek to re-connect with that sense of identity and personal autonomy, in partnership with the coach.

#### Reflections on Theme

For me, the concept of power is central to this study in that, in one sense, there is an unbalanced discourse on coaching in that it privileges the coach at the expense of the coachee. However, as argued above, the corollary of being more empowered within the coaching relationship also means that you are more responsible which comes with its own pressures. This perhaps explains why there has been such a focus within the coaching world on return on investment on the part of coaching and coaches. Coaches feel the need to justify their fees and their status as process experts. Because of these expectations, they seek to do this by celebrating the status of their coaches as argued above. My sense is that there is a huge power in the discourse that comes via professional bodies, coaching practitioner texts as well as academic ones and events e.g. conferences, workshops and master-classes. These mechanisms can be seen as dissemination mechanisms which serve to re-enforce and magnify the prevailing discourse - these have been expanded by the use of social media, principally through

Facebook, Twitter and Linked In which have enabled coaches to have an online presence. They perpetuate the view of coach as being the process expert, with the coachee, by contrast, being seen as lacking in power and influence. However, this stands at odds with the (also) dominant view within coaching that the coachee should be placed at the centre of coaching. As argued in the literature review, almost all brands and approaches to coaching claim to put the coachee at the centre of what they do. That said, in my experience, coaches often espouse coachee-centrality in terms of the coaching and, like the coachees in my study, appear to be self deprecating in their stated view of themselves and their impact on the coachee. However, this seems to be a "mock" humility as this contrasts with the rhetoric - ie videos, testimonies, endorsements from large private businesses - which appears on the coaches' websites and, as argued above, re-iterated on social media. Coachees 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in my study all made some reference to moving into the area of people development activity at some point in their careers and discussed how they would build up their businesses. As a coach, I often experience novice coaches, who wish to move into full time coaching practice, seeking to focus on their marketing of their services. These novice coaches tend to have had a successful career as a manager and have then come into contact with people development work, either through their involvement with a coaching programme or through executive coaching on an individual basis. Despite the rhetoric about the coachee being central to them and their work, it is interesting to note that their forays into coaching are based on their previous experience as a manager and their level of seniority within that previous business. It is often this work and the seniority of clients and the prestige of the client organisations that they have worked with which they wish to put forward on websites and social media. For me, these actions suggest that, despite claims to the contrary, there is a tacit belief that the coach is able, somehow, to take credit for the achievements of the coachee, stemming from the coaching process. Furthermore, there is also a belief that this self marketing is essential to being seen as credible as a coach. Hence, this pressure in terms of expertise, expectations and the downplaying of the coachee's power, define the context in which much coaching activity takes place. My data analysis is part of an attempt, within this thesis, to make a contribution to that by addressing the research objectives set at the beginning of this process. Below, I will spell out how these research objectives have been met.

## Answers to Research Objective Questions

To move forward within this thesis, it is important to spell out what contribution this thesis is making in terms of an original contribution to knowledge. Firstly, it is important to state that, whilst I have made a number of comments about therapy and the self within society, I see the principle contribution that I am making as being to the coaching world. Coaching, at the moment, has an unbalanced, disproportionate amount of focus in terms of coach skill and attributes. The skills of the coach have been well documented and researched in a number of different books and journal articles, as discussed here. This has not happened in sufficient depth and detail for the coachee. I will conclude the thesis by going through each of the research questions and I will answer them in turn.

What do coachees do in coaching conversations with coaches, which influences coaching?

Coachees seek to influence coaching conversations in terms of process, both consciously and unconsciously. They do this by answering questions and responding to challenge in different ways. The ways in which they respond can either influence the coaching process in terms of enabling greater depth or speed of conversation or it can restrict those things. This is a collaborative effort with the coach but can involve active resistance to the coach and where they try to take the conversation.

How do they use conversational devices and strategies?

As shown in the enabling and defensive data analysis chapters, coachees use a range of conversational devices - engagement with metaphor, being clear about goals, stating what is important - which enable coaching conversations to progress. The enabling strategies used by the coachee are practising difficult conversations, scenario planning, remaining open to different processes, seeking to challenge their own thinking. The defensive strategies, however, include deflection and diversion where

the coachee employs these, often unconsciously, to protect themselves from embarrassment or threat and to avoid engaging too deeply in areas that they do not wish to discuss in depth at that particular time. These devices and strategies are often employed in combination with each other as the relationship progresses. These skills interact with the skills employed by the coach to inform how the coaching relationship plays out.

What impact do these have on coaching process?

The enactment of the devices and strategies by the coachee has a dual effect on the coaching process. Firstly, using these devices and strategies can be helpful to the coach as it gives them avenues to pursue by engaging and manipulating coachee metaphors, content expertise in terms of the issue that the coachee wishes to discuss and conversational arenas within which to probe and challenge the coachee. Secondly, the enactment of devices and strategies which protect the coachee from going more deeply into certain areas has the impact of restricting the range and reach of the coach in terms of making progress in the relationship. This can prove challenging to the coach if they become aware that this is happening but, due to the subtlety and unconscious enactment of some of the strategies and devices, this can result in the coach believing that they have sufficiently challenged and explored the pertinent issues with the coachee, even if certain areas are successfully avoided. The impact of this can be that, in order to perpetuate the relationship, some measure of avoidance is necessary to prevent a fatal rupture in the relationship. Hence, the impact of the devices and strategies is functional in that it enables both parties to remain in the relationship and to continue to build trust and rapport by engaging with the enabling mechanisms in future sessions.

What skills do they demonstrate in using these conversational devices and strategies?

Coachees hence demonstrate several skills. These can be grouped into conscious and unconsciously enacted skills. Consciously enacted skills are used where the coachee uses their expertise in their own life to frame the conversation so as to direct it to

focus on areas that they wish to explore and focus on. This requires a clear understanding of what they wish to achieve from the coaching relationship and the conversation. This need not be expressed in terms of goals but is about having a purposeful conversation. The coachee uses the skills of articulation and being in touch with what they are experiencing to dictate the path of the conversation in this sense. The coachee also has cognitive skills in terms of understanding the coaching process which enables them to remain open in terms of engaging with different techniques, coaching processes and interventions as proposed by the coach. This skill is supported by having a familiarity and theoretical knowledge of the purpose of coaching and how it might be used in relation to issues that the coachee faces. A key set of consciously enacted skills are those of reframing. The coachees in the study demonstrated their ability to challenge and change their own thinking in partnership with the coach's interventions. These were often enacted by the coachee using the coach as a sounding board for their ideas and in engaging in experimentation and role play. Coachees can also use their work with the coach to become clearer about what is truly important to them and this can be helpful in directing action plans and decisions that need to be taken as a result. Finally, coachees also demonstrate reframing skills by being able to express their issues in terms of an accessible metaphor or image that coaches are then able to engage with, as well as being able to manipulate and reflect on the metaphor being used.

On the other hand, coachees also demonstrated skill in terms of managing and influencing the coach and the coaching conversation in more subtle and less conscious ways. This involved deflecting the conversation away from emotionally challenging or difficult areas by skilful use of language, albeit unconsciously at times by seeking to distance themselves from the topic area in question, either by using language that enabled a depersonalisation of the issue or exploring the principle in the abstract. Coachees also demonstrated skill in the way that they also diverted the coach on occasion which was effective in building the rapport and the relationship - through use of humour and self deprecation but which contained the conversation in an area which left the coach with little room to manoeuvre.

Now these initial questions have been answered, I will now move forward and draw some conclusions. Within these, I describe an alternative discourse of coaching, within

which coachee skills and agency are included. I will argue that this is essentially through a process of equal collaboration with the coach.

## Conclusions

Coaching relationships, like any other personal relationship are developed within a social context. As I have argued, the context for coaching is significantly influenced by power and social relations within which it is located. Key stakeholders - coaches, managers, government officials, professional body representatives - have tended to dominate what is said and done in coaching. This has led to a version of self as client, helpee, coachee and member of society as being portrayed as enterprising and discerning in terms of making purchase decisions about professional help (Rose, 1999). In keeping with Western's (2012) notion of the celebrated self and Du Gay's (1996) view of the entrepreneurial self within the workplace, getting support has been portrayed as a positive step in terms of taking control of one's life and career. However, this proactivity does not extend to these customers having agency in terms of how they engage with these helpers. In this sense, this discourse contains within it a mixed message / contradiction. On the one hand, clients of helping professionals, coaching in particular, are portrayed as discerning autonomous agents who seek to make an informed purchase of process expertise from a service provider. However, once within the process, an examination of what is written and said about coaching tends to reduce their role in this process to one of recipient of the helper's process. This as I have argued, can be attributed to those powerful stakeholders referred to above having a vested interest in privileging their process expertise above the lived experience expertise of those being helped (Rettinger, 2011). However, despite this, as with Colley's (2003) study of mentees in engagement mentoring schemes, this study suggests that coachees are able to and do influence the process of coaching, despite the dominant rhetoric regarding the coaches. Her work also suggests that the mentors themselves were as constrained as the mentees in terms of what they could and could not do within the confines of the mentoring relationship. Taking this into account, it is important to recognise that my intention is not to replace a coach-dominant rhetoric with that of a coachee dominated one. Rather, it is to argue for a reframing of our understanding as to how and why coaching is effective and why it might not be.



By examining these connections, it is possible to draw some conclusions that underpin the alternative discourse of coachee skills:

1. **Coaching is a skilled collaborative partnership** where coach and coachee skills are integrated together to form a conversation and a relationship. Power in the relationship is relational and created between the participants, rather than being principally held by one participant. Following Lukes (2005), it could be argued that coaching represents a context bound, rather than context-transcending relationship; in other words, I, as a participant in a coaching relationship will only be able to exercise power over the other party within the context and conditions stipulated as part of the contract between both parties - outside of those, my influence is limited. For instance, Coach 5 cannot compel Coachee 5 to take action on any of the issues discussed, nor can he make him continue with the relationship. Coach 6 cannot make Coachee 6 reveal things she does not want to reveal in the coaching relationship and Coach 2 cannot make Coachee 2 take ownership of challenges and inconsistencies in what she says. Furthermore, it is important to recognise inaction - a failure to make an intervention when it is possible to do so - can also be seen as powerful - Lukes (2005) refers to this as inactive power. Hence, by withdrawing literally or psychologically from the relationship or the coaching conversation, the coachee has the power to equalise that of the coach. By the same token, if the coachee willingly engages and actively commits to the coaching, and uses their skills to further the progress of the relationship, the coaches in this study suggest that the coaching is likely to progress more quickly and effectively than with others who do not have this commitment and engagement. This view of the coaching relationship strongly challenges the image of the skilled helper working with a fundamentally unskilled helpee (Egan, 2014).
2. **Defensiveness does not mean dysfunctional** - as I have argued, all behaviours that the coachee exhibits in the coaching relationship has a function. Defensive behaviours on the part of the coachee serve to protect the coachee from too much embarrassment or threat in the coaching relationship and conversations. They are, following Argyris and Schon's (1996) notion of defensive routines, fundamentally about preserving the status quo in the conversation and the

relationship. Cavanagh et al (**2011: 1**) argue that the primary purpose of coaching is "to enhance well being, improve performance and facilitate individual and organisational change", which has at its essence an assumption that coaching is fundamentally about change, not staying the same. However, the data analysis reveals that a more sophisticated understanding of defensive behaviour is required which moves away from Bluckert's (**2006**) notion of 'coachability' - the idea that an individual is somehow a better coachee than another - to one where the coachee is acting skilfully so as to protect themselves and their autonomous self from perceived threat. It is more useful to recognise that, at a given moment in time, a coachee may be more or less skilled in both enabling and defensive behaviours and that both are necessary to an effective working alliance between coach and coachee. Furthermore, personal change as a process can be seen more as a transition that is more gradual (Bridges, **2003**) rather than an abrupt, discrete shift within which there may be a number of false starts and regression (Daloiz, **1999**)

3. **Responsibility comes with perceived process expertise** - as a number of the coaches in my study experienced, it is worth recognising that a process where the expert is expected to dominate and dictate the methodology places significant pressure on the expert. In coaching discourse, the coach is seen as the skilled actor who is responsible for the design and implementation of the coaching methodology. With the rise of professional bodies, with their code of ethics, as argued in the literature review, there is increased pressure on the coach to be responsible, ethical and professional. Professional bodies like the European Mentoring Coaching Council (EMCC), the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS) each have codes of conduct, requirements for continuing professional development and supervision (Bachkirova et al, **2011**). This professionalization of coaching has led to more focus from buyers of coaching in terms of the return on their investment. As Nielsen and Norreklit (**2009**) have argued, this has brought the voice of the organisation into the coaching room as well as the two participants in the conversation.

Drawing on these three basic propositions, I am therefore proposing a view of coaching where there is equality between coach and coachee in terms of the process and skills involved. Whilst the coachee may struggle to achieve their purposes and goals without the skills of the coach, the coach will also struggle to operate effectively as a coach without engaging with and acknowledging the skills of the coachee. I argue therefore that coaching training and development within coaching schemes, leadership programmes as well as educational programmes, should be extended to recognise and work with this largely unrecognised and untapped resource base. Ultimately, I agree with de Haan (2008) that the key ingredient to coaching processes is the strength of the relationship but I assert that the coachee needs to be recognised as a joint partner in this collaborative endeavour.

#### Implications for Different Stakeholders

##### *Coaches*

The theoretical implication of these findings for coaches is that they should be properly considered as comprising one half of the coaching relationship in terms of the process skills required to make the conversation and the relationship work. Recognising the process skills implications for coachees means that coaches need to become more aware of these skills - both enabling and defensive - and adapt the application of their own skills to fit those of their coachees, as described above. For example, coaches may need to reflect on how persistent they are when challenging their clients. As a result, coaches could question themselves as to whether they always follow through on this challenge and ensure that the coachee is addressing the issues that they need to be addressing. This could involve developing new elements to their contracting processes and recognising the importance of striking a balance between appropriate levels of challenge and acknowledging the functional (for the coachee) aspects of defensive behaviours (diversion and deflection). These defensive behaviours, as has been argued above, enable the coachee to persist with the conversation and the relationship.

This also means that coaches can rely more on their coachees in terms of their responsibility for making the conversation and the relationship work. This study suggests that coachees often have a good understanding of the coaching process and

the tools, techniques and language that goes with it. Hence, coaches can be more confident of challenging their coachees to work with coaching approaches/ theories explicitly within the coaching conversations and be willing to use creative methods with their coachees, in the service of helping them achieve their goals and desired outcomes.

#### *C o a c h e e s*

Coachees, as suggested by this research, can, alternatively be thought of as skilled coaching practitioners who are not merely passive recipients of the expert coach's process but who make skilled and significant contributions to the coaching conversation and relationship. However, the converse applies to coachees - coachees have, therefore, a responsibility to use these skills and to recognise when they enable and when they limit progress within the coaching relationship. The implications of this responsibility may mean that coachees might need to invest more time and energy in the coaching process, particularly in terms of their abilities to frame the coaching session and, indeed, to reframe their thinking. In addition, the research suggests that, contrary to the prevailing discourse in coaching, coachees have significant agency within the coaching conversation. Therefore, this raises the possibility of coachees seeking/needing development in how to ensure that their coaching relationships are effective by utilising their own process skills. Furthermore, there is the possibility (argued below) that coachee supervision might be an effective way of (a) understanding how to enable effective coaching conversations and (b) how defensive coachee skills might undermine coaching conversation depth and how these protective behaviours might be used in a more self-aware fashion. In a wider sense, this research also draws attention to the way in which coaching discourse can serve to disempower the coachee and render them more dependent on the perceived process expertise of the coach. By re-casting the coaching relationship in a more collaborative light in terms of process skills, coachees may feel more able to take some control and ownership of their personal development processes.

#### *S c h e m e D e s i g n e r s*

In practical terms, these findings suggest that, for internal coaching programmes, more emphasis should be placed on developing coachees to become more aware of the

skills that they have in relation to coaching. In particular, these conclusions I have drawn from this research suggest that coachee development should be focused on the coachee's responsibilities in working in collaboration with their coach in order to maximise the chances of the conversations being useful to the coachee. However, the heuristic offered above also suggests that it would be important to work with both coaches and coachees on coaching schemes (rather than just coaches) to help each party (a) to understand and develop their own process skills but also (b) to recognise how and in what ways these skills might be employed to complement those of their dyadic partner. Hence, I am suggesting that there is a place within coaching scheme development to argue that, alongside conventional coach-related skills, such as active listening, paraphrasing, summarising and skilful questioning, we also include coachee skills such as framing, reframing, and understanding the coaching process. This would require a significant re-examination of where organisational sponsors of coaching schemes might invest their resources, rather than continuing with the current position of focusing, principally, on coach development.

#### *A c a d e m i c s*

Academics working in coaching, like myself, have three roles to play. One is by contributing to the literature on coaching, through their writing on coaching models and theories. This research suggests that there is some merit in revisiting such models and theories to incorporate coachee skills. However, as I have argued, this should not be in the form of a coachee-centric, as opposed to coach-centric model. Rather, there seems to be sufficient merit in this research to suggest this development.

Secondly, they have a role to play in training and developing coaches and supervisors as part of courses and programmes that they design and teach upon. This research suggests that more emphasis should be placed on helping prospective coaches work more effectively with skilled coachees, and that the prevailing discourse which places them in the expert role and by the same token, the coachee in a passive recipient role, should be challenged. Furthermore, following Bachkirova (2011), coaches need to reflect on the coachee position themselves in terms of working with themselves and their personal reflexivity - I will explore my own personal reflexivity later in this chapter. Finally, academics have a role to play in investigating coachee skills further. As

I will argue below, this is a small scale study which suggests some possible research avenues for others to explore, building on my work here.

#### *P r o f e s s i o n a l B o d i e s*

As I have argued throughout the thesis, professional bodies have a great deal invested in preserving the status quo within coaching as, with professionalization, comes notions of expertise and specialism (Rose, 1999) which allow claims for greater fees and social status to be justified. Making claims for coachee process skills and an equalisation of the relationship between coaches and coachees might in this sense challenge this position. It is noticeable that, although all of the professional bodies mentioned have a code of ethics and guidelines for practice, these, typically do not extend to govern the conduct of coachees. This indicates where the professional bodies sit in terms of who is deemed to be responsible for the conduct and outcome of coaching processes. This research suggests that this position needs to be revisited, with a recognition that, like with coaches, coachee empowerment confers greater responsibilities as well as greater process influence. Furthermore, as I have suggested above, a recognition of coachee skills - both enabling and defensive - does also imply that coaches may need to refine and develop new skills that work in complement to those coachee skills. Thus, professional bodies - particularly those who accredit/audit training providers - may need to consider how greater coachee agency and skill should be incorporated into professional coaching standards for coaching training.

#### *S u p e r v i s o r s*

The focus of this research has not principally been about supervision, supervisors and supervisees. However, as I have acknowledged in the Research Methodology Chapter, the notion that I was working with coaching pairs on their coaching practice and inviting them to reflect on it, is not unlike coaching supervision itself. This was different, however, and arguably more powerful because Paul as quasi-supervisor was not experiencing the coachee's voice being mediated through the coachee as you might expect in conventional supervision. Rather, it was possible for Paul to directly observe coaching behaviours and then compare this with the accounts given and to identify key learning points from that process. It is clear from the data analysis that several of the coachees as well as the coaches learnt from the process and were able

to put that learning into practice in other areas of their lives. Hence, the research methodology itself may provide a process for willing pairs in coaching relationships to engage in, which may enhance the understanding of all parties in the relationship, including the supervisor. This development might also, itself, enhance the status of coachees from being seen as passive recipients of process expertise to that of being engaged in a democratic, reflexive process.

#### *T h e r a p i s t s*

Again, it is important to state that this research, whilst drawing on selected literature from counselling and psychotherapy, was not focused on these as helping processes. Nevertheless, it could be argued that therapy clients could potentially have the same or similar process skills as coachees. Therefore there may be some merit in therapists rethinking their notions of process expertise, within their context. This would involve thinking beyond effective clients at the end of the process in terms of life skills and more in terms of drawing on the client skills as a resource within the therapy itself.

#### Lim itations of Research

Inevitably, as with any piece of research, this has its limitations. The research represents a snapshot of a small number of coachees being coached plus their reflections on this process directly afterwards and then some weeks later. Hence, it is important to be careful about the claims made as a result of the research for a number of reasons. First of all, it should be recognised that the specific findings were collected within a specific context at a particular time, with specific coaching pairs at certain stages of their coaching relationships. In that context, it is not possible to generalise beyond that context and suggest that these relationships or conversations are representative in a positivist sense (Ritchie et al, 2014). The intention was to use this research to supply a potential alternative discourse, rather than to demonstrate a cause and effect relationship. Secondly, whilst it would have been desirable to be able to compare and contrast coachees in terms of their different stages of familiarity with

the coaching process, this was not feasible due to the relatively challenging issue of getting coaching pairs to agree to be filmed and interviewed on camera. The advantage of filming participants (and myself) was that it has been possible to bring the interventions to life for the purposes of data analysis and to understand the context within which the behaviour was undertaken. Set against this is the disadvantage of encroaching on a private space in a way that is not naturalistic for the coaching pair i.e. they would not normally be videoed and have another person in the room observing them. A number of the pairs explicitly said that, after a few minutes that had forgotten that the camera was there and that I was observing them. However, it is not possible to know what direction those particular coaching sessions would have gone were it not for my interventions. Furthermore, as discussed below, it would have been interesting to know whether and to what extent the interventions changed the relationship and the ensuing conversations as a result.

#### Future Research

In terms of future research in this area, there is much scope for additional work on what constitutes coachee skills and input into the coaching process. In this piece of work, I was able to identify and develop an alternative discourse to the dominant coach-centric discourse in the field. However, there are a number of ways in which this research might be extended. Firstly, this research included coachees who could be considered skilled coachees, in the sense that the majority of them were engaged in developmental work in some way already, had familiarity with the language of coaching and personal development and were familiar with coaching processes and systems. Research which directly compared coachees with little or no familiarity/exposure to coaching might challenge or extend the categories of coachee skill developed in this research. Secondly, this research was developed by looking at a snapshot of coaching conversations and inducting from them an alternative way of seeing coaching. Although there was follow up in terms of the interview process, it would nevertheless be useful to see the impact of the interventions on future coaching sessions. Would the knowledge of both parties, that the coachee had skills that were both enabling and defensive impact significantly on the coaching process itself? If this were the case, this would suggest some interesting implications for how coaching supervision should be conducted. In particular, it raises questions about whether the



supervision process should include both coach and coachee and where there is additional learning that can be gained for both coach and coachee. This, in turn would place Nelson- Jones's (2002) concept of the skilled client in a rather different context, suggesting that coachee skills could be taught and developed. Related to the teaching and development of coachee skills, a piece of action research where coachees were developed, as well as coachees as part of a coaching scheme where the researchers attempted to measure the impact in terms of outcomes, efficacy of coaching and strength of relationship would also be a useful way of extending this work.

### Personal Reflexivity

As I have argued throughout this thesis, this research process has been a personal journey as well as research journey. Engaging with the concept of coachee skills has meant that I have immersed myself (Moustakas, 1990) in the process, as a coach, coachee, supervisor, supervisee and therapy client. This has meant that, as well as learning from the client/coachee (Casement, 1985,1990, Howe, 1993), I have also learned about this process through my own experience and reflexivity. I have come to recognise in myself strategies that I use in the above categories of relationship to make them work for me. In particular, I have become aware of how I use diversion and deflection routinely when being helped and what this means for the efficacy of these interventions. As a therapy client, I have become more conscious of how personal disclosure of feelings can (a) be useful in helping me to communicate and to stay in touch with those feelings and (b) reassure the therapist that they are 'getting somewhere', even when perhaps deeper issues and feelings are being withheld from the therapist. To some extent, as with the coachees in the study, my responses have been unconscious and I have believed, in the past, that I was responding openly and fully to any questions. However, by engaging with the data collection and analysis process, I have recognised that, despite my best effort, my unconscious processes of deflection and diversion are militating against the therapist/helper by constraining any topic areas to ones I am comfortable with. I believe that, because I am familiar with the language of coaching, adult development and psychotherapy, I can make it quite difficult for the helper to see any deflection/diversion because this occurs alongside other things which, on the surface appear more positive. Set against that, I am also recognising that, by understanding that these processes occur, I feel more able to stay

with the challenging feelings and hold myself more open to the process for longer. As a result of this research, I have recognised the importance of sitting with such feelings rather than seeking to deny, resist or suppress them which has meant that I am more aware of my desire to deflect or divert the therapist away from areas that I am not comfortable with. The same challenges apply when I am in the coachee role.

As a coach, these observations have added significance. From the data analysis, it was clear that, despite some evidence of unconscious collusion with the coachees, all the coaches were, nevertheless, able to make conscious decisions about when to challenge the coachee, within the coaching conversation. In Coach I's case, the deflection was made explicit and brought to coachee's conscious awareness, when referring to the use of language outside of self. For me, it has helped me to recognise the multi-faceted nature of challenge. In order to be truly effective as a coach, I need to be mindful of the importance of taking action to challenge coachee but also the powerful impact that 'inaction' can have, as Kline (1999) argues. On the one hand, by challenging the coachee strongly, I may disrupt or subvert a potentially useful train of thought or, more seriously, cause a rupture in the relationship. It is helpful, also, to recognise that, the defensive behaviour is helpful to the coachees as it enables them to continue with the relationship and the conversation by not moving too quickly (for them) into areas that they are uncomfortable with. On the other hand, by either consciously or unconsciously deciding not to challenge the coachee, I recognise that I may be choosing to privilege my own comfort and desire to avoid conflict above what is helpful to the coachee in the long term.

Within supervision, as argued above, I recognise that there are several implications. Firstly, as a supervisee, I recognise that there is significant merit in having someone directly observe a session where I am coaching (I have done this recently with colleagues). It enables me to gain additional insights into my coaching practice and to recognise and engage with my own approach to coaching. Furthermore, the research also helps me to recognise that there are similar dynamics going on within supervision to that of coaching, in terms of defensive and enabling mechanisms. In addition, it draws my attention to the power dynamics at play within the coaching profession and the role that supervision plays in this. As Lane (in Bachkirova et al, 2011: 95) points out, different professional bodies have quite different stances on supervision, in any

event, but each of these contributes to the professional discourse within coaching. As a supervisor, therefore, I am now more conscious of the role that this discourse plays in influencing the expectations of my supervisees and, inevitably, my own view of what effective supervision looks like.

Finally, as a researcher, undertaking this research project has influenced me in a number of ways. Firstly, although I recognised that my position with regard to coaching was necessarily subjective and inevitably influenced by my own experience in the field, I had not thought to extend this perspective to my research design and methods. This is somewhat ironic as it mirrors my journey in coaching in terms of a late recognition of its personal impact! By engaging with my own experience, however, I found that I was able to identify additional insights and connections that would not have been possible without. My initial reservation was that I did not want the research to be focused on me and my insights, as, following Holland (1999), I was concerned that this would privilege my own account to the exclusion of other insights. However, what instead happened was that, by bringing to the research my own philosophical commitments, I was able to be explicit about my own voice and to contrast this with the other voices in the study. Secondly, the research process has brought home to me how interviews, in particular, can be seen as vehicles for self expression and positioning one's own identity, as coaching itself can be. Finally, the research process has confirmed to me how important it is to recognise any research mechanisms as an intervention - it is clear that, for several of the participants, the research process itself has influenced them in terms of their future practice, either as coaches or as coachees.

#### Concluding Remarks

In summary, I have, in this research process, sought to offer an alternative discourse of coaching which allows for a more empowered coachee who has more agency within a coaching relationship. Whilst I do not claim to have developed a new theory of coaching, I believe that what I offer here is a contribution to knowledge on coaching, which gives novel theoretical insights into the coaching process and the relationship between coach and coachee.

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## **Research & Professional Development Opportunity**

### **Introduction**

For my Phd studies, I am researching the idea of the skilled coachee within a coaching relationship. What I am particularly interested in is how the coachee influences and contributes to the process of coaching and how they contribute to the coaching relationship. My initial research findings suggest that much of the existing research focuses on what the coach does and how they influence the relationship. An unfortunate unintended consequence of this is that there has been relatively little attention on the coachee as an active participant within the coaching relationship. Instead, existing literature and research on coaching seems to characterise the coachee as being a somewhat passive recipient of the coach's process and interventions. As a result, the possibility that a coachee can develop their effectiveness as a coachee has been overlooked to a significant extent.

### **Research**

What I am doing is working with a number of coaching pairs to try and understand the role of the coachee within the coaching relationship a little better. In this sense, I am seeing both the coaches and coachees in this research as being co-researchers with me as we explore these ideas. The data collection has three stages:

1. Coaching Session Observation - I observe and film a normal coaching session between a coaching pair.
2. Paired Interview - Straight after the session, I interview the pair as a pair using a semi structured interview process but feeding in observations from the session
3. Individual Interviews - Between 2-4 weeks later, I interview coach and coachee separately, bringing in observations from the session and the paired interview to inform the discussions

Clearly, this will be different from normal coaching conversations as these tend to be confidential to the participants involved, and are not filmed/observed. However, my intent is to only use these to inform my own analysis - no-one else will see the videos apart from me. The individual sessions (stage 3) will remain between me and the individual participant - they will not be fed back to the other member of the pair. I will be obliged to keep the data stored on a hard drive in case the PhD examiners want proof that the data has been collected (does not normally happen) but otherwise will not be available to anyone else.

### **What I need**

I need coaches and coachees who are willing for a coaching session to be observed by me and then to be interviewed (a) as a pair directly after the coaching session and then (b) individually either by telephone or face to face. These pairs need to be in an existing coaching relationship.

### Outcomes

My expectation is that, as well as helping me to achieve my research objectives, that this will be a useful and helpful exercise for all participants, which would act to strengthen and support the coaching interventions. For coaches, it provides an opportunity, in some senses, for free live supervision of their practice, although the intent would be slightly different. For coachees, it provides an opportunity to reflect on how they can get the most out of the coaching process and added value in terms of enhancing their self awareness.

### Practicalities

I will come to wherever the coaching is taking place, as long as this is practically and economically feasible for me